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**The Good Church**  
**an exploration in virtue ecclesiology**

Fitzmaurice, John

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# The Good Church

an exploration in virtue  
ecclesiology

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an interdisciplinary exploration of the formation of virtuous character in the Church. It critiques the prevailing metaphor of growth within the Church, contending that it has failed within society leading to what Richard Sennett calls a 'corrosion of character'. It is my contention that a similar process can be seen within the Church. I suggest that the growth ethic should be replaced by one based on virtue.

The work of both Sennett and Erich Fromm is used to critique this 'growth ethic'. MacIntyre's proposal for a recovery of a virtue-based ethic is examined and interpreted theologically through the concepts of narrative theology, community, sacraments and sanctification. Here the work of Hauerwas is also significant.

Central to MacIntyre's project is the role of 'practices' in developing virtuous character. MacIntyre's proposal is read in dialogue with the pedagogy of Etienne Wenger, and both are critiqued by the as potentially idealist by the work of Nicholas Healy.

The nature of a virtuous organisation/church is then explored through the discipline of organisational psychodynamics, notably thought the work of Bruce Reed. The confluence between Reed's work and the ascetical theology of Martin Thornton is noted. This psychodynamic insight is then used to explore the role of character in the tasks of the Church that involves a focused understanding of kenosis as a form of vicarious self-offering. This understanding of a virtuous Church is used to inform a model of Church as a Community of Interpretation, not just of its own normative narrative, but also of the society in which it is placed – the Church offers an analysis of its own internal life as a mode of interpretation of the dynamics of the wider society.

This preferencing of internal goods over external (in MacIntyre's language), or 'quest' orientation over intrinsic or extrinsic (in the language of Allport &

Ross) then becomes a model for holiness, and I explore how in this context mission becomes the cultivation of holiness, wisdom and right action. I suggest that it is in and through sacramental practices that the transitional space for these virtues to be formed is created.

The penultimate chapter uses current Church of England policy on theological education as a case study to explore the presence and/or absence of notions of virtuous character in ministerial formation.

The thesis ends with a conclusion that seeks to identify some possible ongoing policy implications for the life of the Church were it to adopt the notion of virtuous character as part of its teleology.

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**For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit  
their life? Matthew 16.26a**

## Introduction

### Context

It is clear that we are living through a period of rapid change in the life of the Church. Some of the predictions about the future are apocalyptic. Andreas Whittham-Smith (First Estates Commissioner), addressing the Church of England General Synod in July 2011, said:

The perfect storm we can see arriving fast on the horizon is the ageing congregations. The average age is 61 now, with many congregations above that ... [The year] 2020, apparently, is when our congregations start falling through the floor because of natural wastage, that is, people dying. Another ten years on, some extrapolations put the Church of England as no longer functionally extant at all... I wish all of us would have a sense of real crisis about this ... I have seen large companies perfectly and impeccably manage themselves into failure. Every step along the road has been well done. Every account is neatly signed off. Then, one day, they have gone bust. I sometimes feel the Church is a bit like that. (Church Times 15 July 2011)

Of course it is not the first time that such predictions have been made and historically the Church has survived; however the Church cannot afford to be complacent nor can it deny a real sense of alarm and even panic in certain quarters.

The title of Ann Morisy's book *Bothered and Bewildered* (Morisy 2009) captures the mood well. Morisy contends that British society suffers from dystopia and is a place where people have little or no hope for the future. This is true, she suggests, because both society and the Church are both pervaded by a feeling the things are bad and getting worse (p. 3f). At the root of all this is a breakdown of trust in institutions of any kind, and the loss of a metanarrative that had provided coherence in the past (p.9ff). It

may well be that the metanarratives of yesteryear were as much there to react against as they were to shape communal life, nonetheless their absence is felt. Morisy identifies this as a crisis of identity - we no longer know who we are. She quotes Zigmund Bauman who has used the term 'varielond' to describe this contemporary malaise of western society in the individual as:

...a pilgrim without a destination; a nomad without an itinerary...  
(who) ...journeys to unstructured space; like a wanderer in the desert, who knows of such trails as are marked with his own footprints, and blown off again by the wind the moment he passes, the vagabond structures the site he happens to occupy at the moment, only to dismantle the structure again as he leaves. Each successive spacing is local and temporary. (Bauman 1993 in Morisy 2009 p.9)

It is quite possible to see this dynamic not only in the lives of individuals but also in the identity of organizations and institutions in contemporary society.

What compounds this disorientation is the inability of the institutions that used to provide guidance or even a roadmap for life to do so any more. The old maps no longer meet the need and the new ones are inadequate, not least because we don't trust the institutions that produce them any longer. Morisy notes the inability of the church to give leadership or guidance in this context and she contends that the mere recitation of dogmatic formulae will not do, and indeed are perhaps part of the problem – only a more reflective faith will have the power to inspire people to act in a more hopeful way (p.26)

Another equally pertinent and perhaps even more detailed reading of our current context is provided by Elaine Graham in a lecture (read in her absence due to ill-health) in February 2013 entitled "*Where are we now?*"

*Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Negotiating Religious Voices in Public Places*" (Graham 2013) which pre-empted her subsequent publication of a book of the same name. In her lecture Graham examines the role of religion in public discourse and the access given to faith communities, including the Church, to public debate concluding (along with others) that British society is now entering a post-secular phase in which the views of faith communities are actively being sought out and taken seriously. She cites the attention given to Archbishop Rowan Williams' infamous lecture on Sharia law in February 2008. The presence of his successor Justin Welby on the House of Commons select committee on Banking Standards might be another interesting example.

Graham's reading of this context however is a nuanced one. She is clear that the increased profile of faith perspectives within public discourse should not be mistaken as a sign of religious revival, of a return to the old days – post-secularity should not be mistaken as a return to the privileges of Christendom – we are entering something new in which the old roadmaps are insufficient. Hence the title of Graham's lecture – 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place'; the rock being that of religious revival and the hard place that of secularism, neither of which adequately describe the new context. Anecdotally, the reality and complexity of this new context was vividly experienced by a priest colleague who, visiting a family in his parish, saw side-by-side on their bookshelf a copy of *The Bible* and Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*. Indeed it is the continued prominence of critics of religion such as Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennett and more recently the more moderate voice of Alain de Botton, that mark this new era as a new departure from, rather than a return to, Christendom.

Graham helpfully identifies the role of pluralism in creating this new openness to other cultural and faith perspectives. Many immigrants from outside the UK and especially outside Europe are not willing to embrace the dominant secularism of UK public discourse. This has led to an attempt by the public sector to be culturally hospitable to the nation's new residents by

providing, for example, appropriate chaplaincy services in NHS hospitals. This challenge to secularism from non-Christian faith perspectives has led to the development of a pluralism over and against a monolithic secularism in which Christianity has been able to find a renewed voice and, at best, recognition as the formative faith tradition in this land.

All that said, Graham points to a widespread religious illiteracy in both the public sector and the media. This is evident in a variety of contexts not least in the apprehension of some local authorities on working with local church/fait h communities (despite a renewed enthusiasm for this by national government), and the general poor quality of the coverage of religious matters by non-specialist journalists in both print and broadcast media. Perhaps the clearest manifestation of this problem is the proliferation of courses being made available in the public sector to correct this deficiency<sup>4</sup>.

Yet as we have seen, and as Graham points out in her lecture, national government increasingly recognizes the social capital that churches and faith communities engender and is keen to maximize this potential in an age where financial austerity is leading to the withdrawal of many services at local level. Indeed increasingly faith communities and their networks are seen as key in the renewal of civil society - this is implicit in much of Phillip Blond's *'Red Tory'* (Blond 2010), said to be a significant influence of David Cameron's Big Society agenda, and made explicit by Luke Bretherton in his study of Community Organizing (Bretherton 2010)

The final component of the contemporary post-secular society identified by Graham is what she calls 'Evangelical Identity Politics'. This too can be seen as a response to the dystopia identified by Morisy. Graham likens this to the 'culture wars' being waged by the religious right in the United States against what they perceive as 'progressive political causes'. This then is not about an engagement with public and political discourse and an attempt to shape it

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<sup>4</sup> For example see <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2012/name,75507,en.html>

from within, but rather an attempt to define clear and unchanging Christian values within a culture that it perceives as discriminatory, if not persecutory. Graham is unconvinced by this argument and draws support from a report by the group Christians in Parliament who also reject any notion of persecution.

The Church then finds itself in a period of significant transition, in new and untrodden territory. Amidst much ambivalence, there remains a need for what the church has to offer, something expressed by David Martin and quoted by Grace Davie:

We in England live in the chill religious vapours of northern Europe, where moribund religious establishments loom over populations that mostly do not enter churches for active worship even if they entertain inchoate beliefs. Yet these establishments guard and maintain thousands of houses of God, which are markers of space and time. Not only are they markers and anchors, but also the only repositories of all-embracing meanings pointing beyond the immediate to the ultimate. They are the only institutions that deal in tears and concern themselves with the breaking points of human existence. They provide frames and narratives and signs to live by, and offer persistent points of reference. They are repositories of signs about miraculous birth and redemptive sacrifice, shared tables and gift-giving; and they offer moral codes and exemplars for the creation of communal solidarity and the nourishment of virtue. They are places from which to launch initiatives which help sustain the kind of networks found, for example, in the inner city; they welcome schools and regiments and rotary clubs; they celebrate and commemorate; they are islands of quietness; they are places in which unique gestures occur of blessing, distribution and obeisance; they offer spaces in which solemnly to gather, to sing, to lay flowers, and light candles. They are – in Philip Larkin's phrase – serious places on serious earth. (Martin 1991 in Davie 1994 pp.189-190)

So there is a great paradox in the current landscape – on one hand a resurgence in the visibility of the Church in public debate and discourse, but alongside this the continued decline of the institution of the Church. I would suggest however that what is clear is that recent models of mission and ministry may need to be re-evaluated and new ones developed. This thesis then seeks to understand some of the influences on this new context, and whether the church itself, in its policymaking, may have contributed to its own institutional decline. It seeks also to understand what the new context requires of the community of faith in terms of its ministry and its engagement with the public life of our nation.

### **Interdisciplinary Methodology**

My methodology for this investigation is interdisciplinary. Alongside traditional ecclesiological and theological discourse I will draw on the insights particularly of psychodynamics, educational pedagogy and sociology. But is there a potential danger here? Is this an appropriate methodology to examine the nature of the Church and its mission – should not this be a purer theological dialogue uncontaminated with secular discourse? Undoubtedly there will those who will argue that this is the case, however I suggest that there are a number of good reasons as to why it is not only appropriate to undertake this analysis in an interdisciplinary manner, but that it might even be beneficial to do so. Wesley Carr when discussing interdisciplinary approaches recognises the dilemma and offers two responses. In essence an interdisciplinary approach to theology (or indeed ecclesiology) is an attempt to hold together the realities of systematic theological discourse with the lived realities of human life and ministerial/pastoral experience. As such it a) needs to be tried, and b) it does not claim to be a fully worked through and complete theology. Interdisciplinary approaches are by definition, evolving conversations, work in progress. The experience of those who have attempted such approaches is that they work! There is a resonance between disciplines that is mutually enlightening, (Carr 1989).

Pattison makes a similar point when he describes practical theology as “...a searching, critical, interdisciplinary conversation between contemporary human experience, the insights of modern non-theological disciplines and practices and aspects of the theological tradition.” (Pattison 2013 p.5)

As we have already seen, there has been a significant loss in the ability of secular and public discourse to understand the language of theological discourse. There is a real danger that the church will end up only talking to itself in these discussions. So while it is undoubtedly true that the technical language of theology is more precise and nuanced in describing (at least theoretically) ecclesiological priorities, it is essential to seek to express the same dynamics in a language that can be engaged with in a wider philosophical and political arena. This too is recognised by Carr who suggests that interdisciplinary dialogue is a means of rearticulating the power of Christian symbolism in a generation that largely rejects theological terminology. All of this begs some serious questions about the nature of interdisciplinary studies and so I wish to offer four different models that I believe demonstrate the potential richness of such a methodology.

Firstly there is the **translation** model. Here we simply take a theological concept and re-express it in a non-theological language, be it psychological, philosophical, economic or whatever. The purpose of such an endeavour is not to facilitate any real engagement between the two but simply to use the non-theological discourse as a vehicle for expressing the theological concept. The non-theological language is entirely at the service of the theological. It is sometimes suggested that this is what Carl Jung did in developing analytical psychology, though I suspect while he might recognize that elements of his work had this effect, he would roundly reject such a claim. The translation mode is very much open to corruption and mutation of the original theological concepts (as in Chinese whispers) leading to the claim made most notably by John Milbank (1990) that the social sciences are essentially mutated and corrupted theology. This is a daring claim and one



we shall return to later in this thesis, as it rejects any notion of accurate and appropriate translation and the potential of new insights to emerge from the process of translation itself.

The second mode of interdisciplinary studies we might describe as the **parallel tracks** mode. Here there is a clear recognition that theological discourse is the most appropriate mode in which to talk about the things of God, while also recognizing that there may be more appropriate languages in which to examine the nature of human society or the individual personality. Like the translation model there is little or no real engagement in this mode, both tracks travel alongside each other and the dialogue may leap from track to track, but seldom is there any real insight. This mode is seen often in the work of empirical psychologists of religion such as Leslie Francis.

The third mode has two aspects, the polite and the radical. The polite version of this mode we might call **dialogue**, the radical version, **collision**. Dialogue involves a real engagement between the two discourses in question – a discernment of divergence and confluence. If there is confluence on some matters what might the implications of this be, and likewise what are the implications of divergence? In all of this there are fundamental issues of revelation, how does the church understand and discern God's self-revelation? There is not space to go into great detail on this question, save to say that anyone who engages with interdisciplinary studies will, almost by definition, have a broad understanding of revelation and a belief that it can be discerned in a wider context than that simply encompassed by the institutional life of the Church.

The collision version of this mode is somewhat provocative. Liturgically, Christians are familiar with the notion that the bread of the Eucharist must be broken to fully capture the essence of that which it embodies; indeed preachers frequently speak of breaking the Word as a means of expounding the deeper meanings of scripture. It might be possible to approach

interdisciplinary studies in a similar way, seeking to break apart sacramental language of theology by colliding it (Large Hadron Collider-style) with another discipline - in the impact between these two disciplines a new energy is released, and new insights gained.

For the fourth mode we return to a gentler image. This mode is less a separate mode and more a conceptual undergirding of the concept of interdisciplinary studies. It recognizes that all theology is local theology and is done in the context of local realities and languages (see Schreiter 1997). This view questions the validity of a 'pure' theology - a debate we will revisit below in Healy's suspicion of 'blue-print ecclesiologies'. Sedmack (2005) uses the image of the **theologian as the village cook** – the village cook cooks up a meal using the best available ingredients and that meal will be particular to a place and time. Thus we can say that theology is incarnated in and particular to a time and context. Sedmack writes:

It is meaningful to compare doing local theology with cooking and the product of local theology with food:

- we eat because we are hungry (we do theology out of hunger and thirst)
- food is to be served (theology has a service function)
- food is necessary but always found within a cultural context (doing theology is natural but always takes a particular cultural shape)
- food nourishes and energizes (theology empowers)
- sharing food can be a purpose in itself (like sharing theological discussions)
- sharing food ties a community together (theology is community-building)
- food is, next to language, *the* local cultural product par excellence; ... each family has its favourite recipes (local theologies have particular nuances and particular flavours). (Sedmack 2005 p. 19)

Such an approach challenges the notion that there is somehow only one 'pure' way to do theology and by implication, ecclesiology. Indeed it positively encourages a mixing of ingredients to make a rich and interesting dish. Such an approach recognises the diversity of context and the variety of ingredients that theologising will therefore encompass. Carr (1989) in his exposition of interdisciplinary study makes the point that by its very nature and because of its particularity to a time and a context, interdisciplinary theology is always a partial theology, and should never claim to be otherwise. As we have seen however all theology is to a greater extent 'local'. Indeed Schreier describes the great western theological Tradition as a series of local theologies (Schreier 1997 p.32). Thus the exploration undertaken in this thesis is localised in context and interlocutory discourses as well as by individual interlocutors.

But perhaps there is a fifth model of interdisciplinary studies, particularly those involving the social sciences, and that is of **interdisciplinary studies as a hermeneutical tool**. This is perhaps the model most clearly used in this thesis, particularly in relation to the use of psychodynamic theory and analysis, though as I hope this thesis demonstrates, educational pedagogy can function in this way as well.

Browning (1996) notes the potential of psychoanalysis as a practical hermeneutical discipline (p.83) primarily in its ability to analyse narrative. He notes Ricoeur's exploration of Freudian theory in the development of his own theory of hermeneutical process. Browning observes the link between psychoanalytic theory and the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, that we shall encounter later in this thesis, and he also notes the fact that the process of interpretation is two-way – the therapist is interpreted as much as the client, the interpreter and much as the interpreted:

If we accept Gadamer's claim about the close relation of hermeneutics and *phronesis*, psychoanalysis and most psychotherapy

should be seen as practical hermeneutical attempts to reconstruct through dialogue the experience of the client. Since this reconstruction comes through dialogue, it necessarily entails a reconstruction of the experience of the therapist or counsellor as well. (Browning 1996 p.84-5)

Browning's work on the intersection between psychoanalysis and theology, particularly in relation to Deep Metaphors in psychoanalytic theory (Browning 1987) goes further than my relatively modest ambitions in this thesis, but serves to demonstrate the enormous potential that this dialogue has to enrich the understanding of both theologians and psychologists alike.

All this said, this thesis then sets out to explore the context in which the church currently finds itself and, drawing on the available tools, to cautiously map a potential future direction. In this quest the insights of psychodynamic theory, educational pedagogy and other disciplines will engage with more classical theological discourse. They will both critique and be critiqued by theological discourse to produce what will be an incomplete and partial reading of the problem, but one that nonetheless I hope offers insight and wisdom to those who seek to better understand the Church's mission in contemporary society.

### **Literature Review**

Contemporary ecclesiological discourse however is not short of interlocutors – as the boundaries of interdisciplinary studies merge and expand, so does the list of potential interlocutors. Alongside classical theological and Christological ecclesiological discourse, we can consider pertinent insights from a variety of fields such as sociology, political and liberation theology, organisational studies, missiology, moral theology and organisational psychodynamics. Within an interdisciplinary thesis all of these have a role to play, however such a dialogue would be unmanageable. However, before homing in on those particular interlocutors that I believe offer significant insights to the exploration I have undertaken, it might be

helpful to take a brief overview of the wider scene to contextualise the subsequent discussion.

Paradoxically, classical Christological ecclesiology, that which seeks to model the Church on Christological or Trinitarian principles is not well represented in contemporary writing. The most recent classic text in this genre would seem to be John Zizioulas' *Being as Communion* (1985). Zizioulas uses a Trinitarian methodology to articulate an understanding of the Church as a community in which personhood is achieved and fulfilled. This theme is explored in Chapter 8 of this thesis. For some, Michael Ramsey's classic text *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (1936) remains an exemplary articulation of this model.

Roman Catholic ecclesiological thought has in many ways been more adventurous, benefitting from the impetus of the Second Vatican Council. Prior to Vatican II, the classical model of ecclesiological discourse was being rearticulated by many within the field of *Nouvelle Théologie*, including both Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Henri de Lubac. As this movement straddled the Council, it not only informed the deliberations of the Council but also developed a diversity of opinion which included both those who held an more reactionary approach (Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI is often held up as an example), but also those of a more progressive inclination such as Yves Congar (1965) and Edward Schillebeeckx (1985).

These more progressive thinkers arguably paved the way from one of the most significant theological, and with it ecclesiological, movements of the twentieth century – Liberation Theology. Arguably central to liberation hermeneutic was a sociological critique of both the Church and society that was deeply influenced by Marxism., though liberation practitioners would claim it owed more to Scripture and the practice of the Early Church. Either way, it led to a 'preferential option for the poor', something re-emerging under Benedict XVI successor, Pope Francis. The key ecclesiological impact of this was a reversal of the hereto hierarchal nature of the Church into a

bottom-up grass roots organisation. The Church was conceived as a network of Base Communities animated and informed by the contextual reading of scripture. The seminal exposition of this ecclesiology is in Leonardo Boff's *Ecclesio-genesis* (1986), though it is both implicit in nearly all liberation texts notably Gutiérrez (1973), Sobrino (1988) and Sobrino & Ellacuría (1996). Under the pontificates of both John Paul II and Benedict XVI, liberation theology and practice was at best discouraged, and at worse persecuted, however a significant, cogent and pertinent re-articulation of the principles of liberation ecclesiology as recently re-emerged in the work of Daniel Izuzquiza (2009).

The importance of the Base Community model in subsequent ecclesiological thinking should not be underestimated. Margaret Hebblethwaite (1993), sought to explain her experience of base communities in Latin America to European audiences. As she was doing so experiments were springing up within British and European contexts that sought to replicate some, at least, of the essential elements of the Base Community model. This coincided with new or adapted forms of Religious and monastic Life emerging in places like Taizé, Iona, Corrymeela and Little Gidding as well as in L'Arche communities, amongst others. All of these contained significant diversity and it is difficult to generalise, but much of the practical thinking behind many of them was documented by O'Halloran (1996) as well as Hinton (1993) and Healy & Hinton (2005). A more anthropological analysis of the changes going on within the Church is offered in Arbuckle (1993).

Ecclesiology doesn't exist in a theological vacuum, and the theological shifts from hierarchical models to contextual ones are well documented in the United Kingdom by Leech (1992 & 1997) and in the USA by Schreiter (1985 & 1997).

It could be argued the Liberation Theology has metamorphosed due to its suppression under John Paul II and Benedict XVI, but also its natural evolution and on-going development. What should not be underestimated is

the continuing influence of Base Communities as a significant model of the church, both at a local parochial level, but also in the development of more dispersed networks known as New Religious Movements in the Roman Catholic Church documented by Hayes (2005) and in some Fresh Expressions of Church within the Church of England.

Anglican ecclesiology has learnt much from Roman Catholicism. It could be argued that Anglicanism is, through the parish system, genetically more predisposed towards a local and contextual orientation, though it would be wrong to think that it was without its hierarchical aspects. That said, nearly all contemporary Anglican ecclesiological writing is about the rediscovery of the local ('base?') community. Ecclestone's *The Parish Church?* (1988) is seminal and this thesis draws on some key aspects of the thinking articulated in this book. More recent expositions of the ecclesiology and ministry of the parish include Tory ed. (2004). In the wake of the significant amount of writing on Fresh Expressions of Church and New Ways of Being Church, Croft (ed) (2006) produced a book entitled *The Future of the Parish System – shaping the Church of England for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. This was an attempt to re-articulate a rationale for the parish which it could be argued had been rather excluded from the discourse by an almost obsessive concentration on Fresh Expressions. The text helpfully re-envisioned the parish in a variety of ways for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and recognises that central to future ecclesiology and ministry will be the notion of a 'mixed economy', a combination of inherited parochial models alongside more experimental Fresh Expressions. In much of this writing the boundaries between ecclesiology, missiology and ministry become very thin indeed.

Stephen Croft's 1999 examination of the threefold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon *Ministry in Three Dimensions – ordination and leadership in the local church* contains much of interest ecclesologically. His *Transforming Communities – reimagining the church for the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (2002) is more overtly ecclesiological and offers a biblical and theological rationale for transformative, missional local communities of faith. Robin Greenwood has

covered similar territory. As with Croft, Greenwood's first notable book was on ministry - *Transforming Priesthood* (1994) offered a relational and Trinitarian model of ministry. This thinking was further developed and more ecclesiological in *Practicing Community* (1996). His most recent book *Being Church – the formation of Christian community* (2013) is an overt ecclesiological exploration of the future nature of the church and recognises the central importance of virtue, which this thesis expresses.

In Stephen Pickard's book *Theological Foundations of Collaborative Ministry* (2009) ministerial and ecclesiological concern combine, but with the same ultimate concern that we have seen above, that of reshaping the Church and its ministry, primarily at local level.

The publication of *Mission-Shaped Church* in 2004 and its centrality of subsequent policy has shaped and influenced ecclesiological writing in the Church of England. The report was influenced, (though some would say, sadly not enough) by the work of Lesslie Newbigin (cf. 1995). From it flowed a series of books all of which took mission (church growth) as their focus. Among them was the work of Bob Jackson (2002 & 2005), which is extensively critiqued in this thesis. The effectiveness of evangelistic strategies was explored by Booker & Ireland (2003) and contextual mission was examined in Croft et al (2005). Cottrell (2006) offered a model of parochial functioning that integrated evangelistic activity, as did Bayes & Sledge (2006). Helen Cameron (2010) offered both a practical and more reflective and theological contribution on how the church resources itself in a missional context.

While evangelistic focus has held centre stage, there have been some lone voices that have called for other approaches. A recommitment to social justice in the church's self-understanding and practice has been central to the work of Ann Morisy (1997, 2004, and 2009). More radical visions of the future church are offered by Ward (2002) who suggests that the future is to be primarily found not in geographical communities but within ever



evolving networks and relationships and that our ecclesiological thinking must become fluid enough to encompass this.

Another stream worth noting is the influence of organisational and managerial thinking on the church. This is explored in more detail in the body of this thesis, suffice it to say here that it came to prominence with the publication of *Working as One Body* in 1995, the report of the archbishops' commission on the organisation of the Church of England. This spawned a series of books advocating more managerial approaches not least Nelson (1996) and Grundy (2007). The most recent manifestation of this line of thought is in Keith Elford's book *Creating the Future of the Church – a practical guide to addressing whole-system change* (2013).

A more nuanced and helpful use of organisation and managerial theory and its application to ecclesiological study can be found in the emerging field of Congregational Studies, a discourse that seeks to embrace and facilitate an engagement between anthropology, sociology, organisational studies and theology. Key texts in this discipline are Cameron et al. (eds) (2005) and Guest, Tusting & Woodhead (eds) (2004). Congregation Studies, certainly at this stage in its development, seeks primarily to be a tool of (empirical and ethnographic) analysis that offers a fuller picture of the reality of ecclesial life.

To end this brief review of the ecclesiological context into which this thesis seeks to speak, we should recognise the emergence (perhaps in reaction to some of the above) of a new and significant stream of ecclesiological thought, that of Deep Church. This has arisen independently both in the UK and in the USA as an attempt to counter some of the shallowness of recent ecclesiological / missional writing. Significant texts are Walker & Bretherton (2007) and Belcher (2009).

## **Theological Reflection**

So how are we to find a way through all of this, who will guide us through this vast amount of material, and to what end? Before laying out my rationale for my choice of key interlocutors, it might be helpful to set out the kind of process into which I am inviting them.

Underlying much interdisciplinary study in practical theology is the discipline of Theological Reflection, by which I mean an agreed set of processes and practices whereby lived experience is analysed and reflected upon theologically (using interdisciplinary tools), and possible responses, actions or ways forward derived (see Ballard & Prichard 1996, Green 1990). The Pastoral Cycle that is at the heart of the discipline of theological reflection is described by Ballard & Prichard (1996 p.77-78) describe its four stages thus:

- Experience
- Exploration
- Reflection
- Action

This implicitly is the approach I intend to take, though the my analysis of the Evidence is not ethnographic but literary and the final section, Action, can only be hinted at through a series of suggested responses to what has gone before. Thus this thesis will be both analytical and also normative, not only will I seek to diagnose a malaise at the heart of the contemporary Church of England, but I will also seek interlocutors who will offer possible response to it. In many ways this would seem to be unavoidable, as the process of analysis and diagnosis, and the work of my key interlocutors, is latent with potential remedies.

The process of theological reflection also suggests the modest and temporary nature of this work. By definition the pastoral cycle is cyclical, and the cycle is ever extending. The conclusions of this work must themselves be critiqued by the process that has brought them to existence. As we have already seen above, interdisciplinary theological reflection

needs to be seen as an evolving conversation, a contribution to a wider debate, and not a complete theology in itself.

## **Structure of my argument**

### *Chapter 1*

I start my study with a detailed examination of the current state of British society. I will examine what Richard Sennett calls the New Capitalism and suggest that it functions as a new form of foundationalism in contemporary society. Sennett's work is of significant interest to the case I am seeking to make. Both in the text I draw on most in this thesis *The Corrosion of Character* (1998) and in other work (2003, 2008, 2012) he has traced the erosion of key elements of society and their causes. Sennett's analysis is sociological, but a similar trajectory and indeed conclusions can be found in the work of the clinical psychologist Oliver James (2007, 2008, 2010). My motivation in using Sennett as a key authority is rooted in my contention that the corrosion of character I suggest we see in the church mirrors that in the wider society. Sennett is a key witness and describer of this wider corrosion. The fact that he offers no analysis of ecclesial life, nor is his critique theologically situated, is of no consequence to this thesis.

One of the central metaphors of the New Capitalism is that of growth, primarily economic growth and I will suggest that this has been the dominant metaphor in society for the last 20 or 30 years. I will also suggest however that the recent banking crisis and global financial downturn is evidence that that metaphor has failed. Not only has it failed but it has systematically corroded society at the same time. I will draw on the work of Phillip Blond and others to explore the nature of this corrosion in terms of both political and social capital. I will also examine what is one of the central activities of New Capitalist process, numerical auditing. Such audit procedure is widespread, even endemic, in our society in financial, commercial, retail and service sectors – however real questions are now

being asked of such processes, not least as to whether they delivers the insights that they claims to.

I will also examine the role of Positive Psychology and the positive thinking movement in constructing the contemporary zeitgeist. Again there are questions to be answered as to whether this delivers what it promises - indeed it might be possible to detect a dark underbelly whereby its repression of negativity and realism beneath the false and naïve façade of positivity has led in some part to the crisis in which our society finds itself.

My primary contention, echoing that of Sennett, is that secular society has in recent years seen a corrosion of character - institutional, organisational and personal. Sennett roots much of this within the demands for flexibility within the contemporary workforce. The removal of routine from people's live far from bringing the liberation that was expected has now been seen to be profoundly unsettling.

Alasdair MacIntyre is a central figure in this study and his reading of the dilemmas of our present-day context as being rooted in fragmentation of moral discourse as opposed to the oft-cited pluralism is significant. Although I will subsequently critique the role of foundationalism, MacIntyre's analysis and normative prescription of a retrieved Aristotelianism is as close to being foundational to this thesis as it gets! In mitigation, I would claim that the diversity and extensivity of the authorities that I draw on create a net or mesh on which my central claims rest that is not over dependent on any one interlocutor. MacIntyre develops Sennett's analysis and offers a perspective from moral philosophy. This facilitates a bridging from secular discourse into theological discourse, which is hugely helpful and facilitates much of the interdisciplinary nature of this work. MacIntyre echoes the analysis of Sennett and yet describes it in terms that have theological purchase. All this said, MacIntyre's work is open to criticism as partisan. In many ways *After Virtue* (1981) is not a balanced critique of modernity, but rather a polemic against it, written by someone who was on the verge of conversion to

Roman Catholicism. This is a valid criticism, but does not effect MacIntyre's deployment as a key authority within the thesis, because of the number of other authorities that offer similar critiques of modernity. Were MacIntyre isolated in his assessment of modernity then he would be a less effective authority, but as his position is validated by so many others and, polemical as it might be, so tightly and coherently argued, he remains a significant authority for the case I am making.

MacIntyre amplifies this theory by describing a series of 'characters' that he suggests are produced by this fragmented modernity, among them the character of 'the manager', whom he suggests, embodies and exemplifies many of the characteristics of the age.

The point of my analysis of the corrosion of character in society is to suggest that exactly the same process has gone on within the Church and that the Church has colluded with this, both consciously and unconsciously. I will explore the Church Growth movement where much of this discourse emerges from, and in particular the work of one of its key advocates in the Church of England, Bob Jackson. I will demonstrate that many of the same characteristics emerge within the Church as did in our review of the New Capitalist influence in society – managerialism, numerical auditing, and a commodification of the Gospel.

## *Chapter 2*

Having identified that both society and the Church might well be enslaved to the culture of the New Capitalism, we explore the nature of freedom, and ask if human beings actually really want to be free. I will examine the work of Erich Fromm and explore the ways in which people avoid the call to true freedom. Fromm's work further develops the interdisciplinary nature of this exploration. Fromm himself crosses many borders and the nature of his work examined here can best be described as social psychology. My contention is yet again that such work offers a significant hermeneutical tool to understand the situation of both contemporary society and the contemporary church. An added bonus in Fromm's work is his biblical literacy. This enables a discussion that is both social-psychological and biblical. His ability to read social psychological theory into the biblical narrative moves this thesis into richer and deeper territory. The contribution of a social

psychological perspective alongside that of moral philosophy and sociology strengthens the case for the fundamental analysis that I am making.

Fromm's work is also instructive in that he lays out two opposing 'orientations' of particular relevance in the light of our examination of New Capitalist influence - the acquisitive and the ontological. The life of the Church is then examined in these terms – has the Church bought into the acquisitive at the expense of the ontological? Are current attitudes to evangelism and Church Growth manifestations of this tension?

As part of this exploration of freedom I will briefly review Niebuhr's exploration of the potential relationships between Christ and Culture and question whether there is a way in which the church can engage with culture without being dominated (albeit at times willingly) by it.

I will go on to suggest that one answer to this problem might lie in the practices of Virtue Ethics. I will trace the history of virtue ethics as mode of discourse, including its resurgence in the late twentieth century, as well as its component practices and its relationship to other modes of ethical discourse. I will conclude this chapter by showing how virtue ethics contribute to the formation of an independent character that is properly individuated and able to exercise a proper freedom in decision-making.

### *Chapter 3*

Chapter 3 seeks to sketch how Virtue Ethics might contribute to the development of ecclesial character. I will examine two key elements in virtue ethics, narrative and community, and suggest that they are fundamental to the sacramental practice of Baptism and the Eucharist. Because of this I make one of the key claims of this thesis, that ecclesial character is sacramentally constructed. To explain this in more detail I will examine the insights of narrative theology and how the sacraments are an intrinsic part of it. I will briefly review Avery Dulles' models of the Church paying particular attention to the description of the church as sacramental

communion. This is followed by an examination of sacramentality generally in terms of mediation and agency.

I will go on to examine the relationship between sacramentality and sanctification through the work of Stanley Hauerwas and through Patricia ('Patti') Jung's critique of Hauerwas' work, and this will lead to a model of embodied sanctification.

#### *Chapter 4*

MacIntyre's virtue agenda places a central emphasis on 'practices'. These practices we can perhaps understand as a form of embodied sanctification. I will explore MacIntyre's well-known if somewhat complex definition of a 'practice' and his significant differentiation between the fruits of these practices in terms of inner and outer goods.

MacIntyre's understanding of practices will then be contrasted with that of Etienne Wenger. Wenger's contribution to this exploration is perhaps the most unlikely. He has no overt connections with sociology, moral philosophy, social psychology, psychodynamic, or indeed practical theology! But perhaps this is his strength as an interlocutor. He earns his place in this discussion precisely because he is not coming from the same theoretical place as some of my other interlocutors. Yet he is concerned with the same basic concern, the formation of identity in contemporary society, specifically the contemporary workplace. What is remarkable is how similar his conclusions are! There is no evidence that he has ever read MacIntyre, and certainly MacIntyre is not referenced in Wenger's work, yet their conclusions have much in common. It should be said that Wenger's work is more normative than analytical, though he would argue that he articulation of the dynamics of Communities of Practice is simply a recognition and an explicit expression of what has been happening in human society for millennia. Since I offer, in Chapter 8, a case study of theological education as a mode of formation of virtuous character, the presence of a pedagogist is, I contend, entirely appropriate, not least as it offers a critique/hermeneutic of ecclesial formational practices.

Wenger and his collaborator Jean Lave developed a theory of situated learning that evolved into the concept of Communities of Practice. We will examine Communities of Practice and their role in forming meaning and identity, through a process of negotiating meaning and differing modes of belonging. I will then put both MacIntyre and Wenger under the microscope by examining Nicholas Healy's fairly trenchant critique of practice-based ecclesiologies that focuses on issues of intention and construal.

This chapter ends with the suggestion that 'practices' belong to the realm of what object-relations psychologists describe as 'transitional phenomena'; we will explore what this means and its relationship to sacramentality.

#### *Chapter 5*

The next chapter heads down a psychodynamic route. It seeks to open up a conversation between the formation of virtuous character (both individually and organisationally) and psychodynamic theory.

I explore the psychodynamics of a virtuous organisation as understood by Diamond & Adams (1999) and subsequently involves an engagement with the work of Bruce Reed (1978) and Wesley Carr (1985, 1989, 1997) in particular. Reed's Oscillation Theory offers a psychodynamic reading of Christian ascetic practice. Both Reed and Carr identify the primary function of religion in psychodynamic terms as being the healthy management of dependency. If we take this as a psychodynamic articulation of a theological teleology, then through Reed's exposition of functional and dysfunctional religion we can begin to examine the nature and effects of certain forms of religious practice. This is undertaken on the premise that functional religious practice will lead to the formation of virtuous character. I will also briefly explore the role of doctrine in providing the symbolic boundaries of the 'container' or context in which these psychodynamics are exercised.

The dialogue between psychodynamics and theology is a key part of this thesis. As mentioned above (p.18-19) one of the key functions of this



engagement is hermeneutical. Psychodynamics offer the ability to examine the human interactions behind the propositional concepts of theology and indeed moral philosophy; they allow us to see what might really be going on. This data then must be key to practical theology. Neither Reed nor Carr start from a concern for the formation of virtuous character, but in using them to analyze the potential hidden dynamics of church life, they shed light on much of real value to this exploration. The contribution of psychodynamic discourse is both analytical, in as much as it reveals those hidden human processes, both individual and group; but it is also normative in as much as it offers a model for what Reed calls a more functional religious practice as opposed to one that he contends is dysfunctional.

One of Reed's most interesting insights is the relationship between Manifest and Latent function. Freud originally used this dynamic in terms of dream analysis and subsequently Robert Merton applied it a sociological context. Latent function refers to the unintended consequences of a conscious or 'Manifest' action. For Reed this is of great significance to religious practice – a believer may think that he/she is doing one thing, yet it may have implications and applications that are totally unknown to the practitioner. This is a key concept in a vicarious understanding of the Church – by continuing with its manifest functions it produces a latent effect that is God's mission in the world.

This is contextualised by an exploration of the relationship between psychodynamics, doctrine and sacramental theology, which leads to a more focused exploration of the relationship between psychodynamics, ascetical theology and a virtuous church through the work of Martin Thornton.

#### *Chapter 6*

All this leads to a tentative conclusion as to how the Church can best live out its character as a virtuous institution. This is rooted in an amplification of the assertion Wesley Carr makes about priestly ministry and which this paper contends is true for the Church generally – a Church with a virtuous character will offer itself '... to stand on behalf of others, for a moment at a

point where, for whatever reason, they are (or feel) unable to stand for themselves.’ (Carr 1997, p. 201) So the virtuous or vicarious Church will offer itself as a ‘holding space’ to the wider society, it will hold for it those things that it is unable to hold for itself. This may be considered as enacted virtue. This ‘holding on behalf of’ has both a passive and active aspect and thus can embrace contemplative, pastoral and missionary practice.

I will explore a renewed understanding of kenosis in this context and demonstrate how an understanding of psychodynamics will allow the church to use its own inner life as a tool for interpretation of the wider society. I will examine what it might mean for the church to see itself as a community of interpretation again by drawing on the work of Etienne Wenger and also Stanley Fish. I will describe Wesley Carr’s understanding of the basic psychodynamics of priestly ministry and how this can lead to an understanding of how the Church as a community of interpretation can be a manifestation of the priestly ministry of the whole people of God.

#### *Chapter 7*

This chapter draws the whole argument together and highlights its key elements. Central to this is the rejection of acquisitive practice in the Church and a prioritising of inner goods over external. Growth is not defined as bad, but simply not a first order concern - if it happens, it should be as a by-product of ontology/character. I further explore the notion of orientation in this chapter reviewing intrinsic, extrinsic and quest orientations. This leads to an understanding of the Church as integrated and integrating, and I suggest a clear correlation between the psychological concept of integration and the theological concept of holiness. Thus I propose mission becomes the cultivation of holiness, wisdom and right action.

Having explored the church as a community of practice and also a community of interpretation, I suggest that ultimately it can be seen as a community of learning, a learning that develops those virtues of holiness, wisdom and right action. This is done primarily through sacramental practices that I suggest create distinctive transitional spaces. From this follows an analysis of the nature of liturgical formation and how this creates

a learning architecture for holiness. Wenger's different modes of participation are drawn upon to analyse the different ways that people might engage with the church and how these different levels of engagement are to be cultivated.

#### *Chapter 8*

The final chapter is a case study that seeks to apply and examine how all this works within a particular context – that of theological education. I begin by revisiting the work of Bob Jackson as representative of the Church Growth Movement and subsequently examine the current policies of Ministry Division (particularly in assessment of IME) in the light of virtue ethics and virtue ecclesiology. I then look at the imminent launch of Common Awards that I identify as a great opportunity for the Church to review certain of its policies and I suggest some way in which it might seek to create a learning architecture more conducive to the formation of virtuous character both individually and corporately in the Church.

#### *Conclusion*

The thesis ends with a conclusion wherein I will seek to affirm the validity of my analysis and I seek to draw some simple inferences from my argument for future policy and polity within the Church.

## **Chapter 1: Foundationalism and the Corrosion of Character**

### **1.1 Introduction**

It is a truism to say that every generation believes that it lives in an age of significant change and upheaval of one kind or another. Those living over the turn of the 20-21<sup>st</sup> century have as good a claim as any to such a description, and one of the crises of our age is a crisis of epistemology - how do we discern what is real, what is true, what is authentic, what is foundational?

This crisis has come to a head in the last two decades of the twentieth century which saw the emergence of a new and aggressive form of financial ideology and its rooting as foundational within the political discourse of the United States, the United Kingdom and much of Western Europe. Many different terminologies have been used to describe this ideology –Free-Market Capitalism being perhaps the most common. In both the United States and the United Kingdom many named it after the administrations that introduced it, thus in the United States it became known as 'Reaganomics', in the UK it is generally referred to as Thatcherism, though its influence was to outlast both the leaders who oversaw its introduction. The sociologist Richard Sennett, who has tracked the corrosive effects of the failures of this approach and whose work we will explore below, simply describes it as the New Capitalism.

By the mid-1980s western society had reached a point where the dominance of the Free-Market and its role as foundational in that society was seen as unassailable - people's right to choose was sacrosanct. This led to an interpretation of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dismantling of the USSR as being a victory of the western foundational ideology of free-markets over that of the foundationalism of the state within the Soviet Union. So comprehensive was this victory seen to be that the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama famously described it as 'the end of history'(Fukuyama, 1989). Little did he know!

The speed of the rise of the New Capitalism was matched only by the speed of its decline. In 2008 the world economy was hit by a huge banking crisis that originated in the American 'sub-prime' mortgage market. In a matter of weeks it became clear that the king had no clothes and that the banks simply did not have the reserves to cover their liabilities – the New Capitalism was seen to have overreached itself and this led to economic meltdown. Thus the world generally and western society in particular now finds itself somewhat adrift as it begins the second decade of the twenty-first century. The two prevailing foundational ideologies that have contested to regulate its life in the latter half of the twentieth century (Capitalism and Communism) both seem to have failed, and as yet there is no obvious new model to replace either of them, there are no new foundations. Once again it can be said that we live in an age of anxiety.

It is the contention of this thesis that a not dissimilar process has gone on within the Church. I suggest that the Church has become enculturated within the New Capitalism that has dominated British Society in recent years as it has sought a foundational rationale for its faith and practice. Part of this process has been consciously undertaken while other aspects have been unconsciously absorbed. Generally however I suggest that this process, both in its conscious and unconscious aspects, has been indiscriminate and at times collusive. This has led to the 'corrosion of character' (Sennett, 1998) that has been seen in the institutions and organisations of the wider society taking its toll on the character of the Church as well. This chapter seeks to map that corrosion of character both in society and in the Church, while the following chapter will seek to understand why this indiscriminate enculturation took place and propose a more appropriate model for the church's engagement with society.

## **1.2 Character, Society and the New Capitalism**

I suggest at the outset of this paper that what we are witnessing at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century is the failure

of foundationalism. Almost without exception those institutions which society deemed to be foundational to its functioning have collapsed, from the meta-narratives of communism and capitalism to the institutions on which they were co-dependent, the banks, parliament (including any real sense of participatory democracy), and most recently the media and the police.

We will examine the philosophical roots of foundationalism in more detail in the following chapter, suffice it to say at this point to say that foundationalism was the search for the solid foundation on which an epistemology or method of understanding society and how we live could be built. From its Cartesian origins there have been numerous attempts and disagreements over what these foundations might be (and one of the characteristics of foundationalism is its ability to cast itself anew at great speed – ‘if that isn’t the foundation, then this must be’). However the one thing that all hypothesised foundations would seem to have in common is the fact that they have failed to deliver - indeed much post-modern philosophy would suggest that the search for an epistemological foundation was fruitless and in vain.

#### **1.2.1 The Failure of ‘Growth’ as the prevailing foundational metaphor**

Perhaps the dominant foundational metaphor of the New Capitalism has been that of economic growth. Actions are validated simply on the basis of their ability to yield growth, yet there were within the New Capitalism few criteria to assess whether or not that growth was a good thing – the New Capitalism abandoned any teleological concept of society or humanity for simplistic and short-term economic gain. Yet what the financial crash of 2008/9 has taught us is that not all growth is good, something the medical world is well aware of. Indeed it is not too farfetched to see much of the growth produced by the New Capitalism as cancerous, an attitude of mind that permeated and spread throughout our society. This abandonment of any teleological vision for society and individuals reached its zenith when Margaret Thatcher famously claimed that there was no such thing as society,

though this claim has been subject to some recent revisionist interpretations. Yet the metaphor of growth and increased productivity has permeated not just the financial and commercial sectors of our society, but also the service sector particularly in the areas of education and health; indeed the very process of government has become dominated by it.

Few people have documented the corrupting effect of the dominance of market-based and statist-based ideologies more vividly than Phillip Blond in his book *Red Tory* (Blond, 2010).<sup>9</sup> Blond lays the breakdown of British civil society at the feet of the neo-liberal economic policies of both the Thatcher and Blair governments and their successors, and the statist infrastructures that developed to police these policies, which has led to an 'uncritical alliance between state and the market' (p.4). This has been brought about by the disappearance of all other sources of independent autonomous power (p.4). The symptoms he describes in graphic, if somewhat inflated, terms are:

...increasing fear, lack of trust and abundance of suspicion, long-term increase in violent crime, loneliness, recession, depression, private and public debt, family break-up, divorce, infidelity, bureaucratic and unresponsive public services, dirty hospitals, powerlessness, the rise of racism, excessive paperwork, longer and longer working hours, children who have no parents, concentrated and seemingly irremovable poverty, the permanence of inequality, teenagers with knives, teenagers being knifed, the decline of politeness, aggressive youths, the erosion of our civil liberties, and the increase of obsessive surveillance, public authoritarianism, private libertarianism, general pointlessness, political cynicism and a pervading lack of daily joy. (Blond 2010 p.1)

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<sup>9</sup> Blond's contribution to this discussion is of interest largely because of his philosophical, theological and political allegiances. Formed within the school of Radical Orthodoxy, which is often understood as theologically conservative and social liberal, yet heading up a right-leaning think tank, he offers a reading of society strained through a fascinating variety of epistemological positions. His disdain for Thatcherite liberal economics is particularly notable in the light of his formation role in casting the Conservative (coalition) government's notion of a Big Society.

Central to Blond's diagnosis is his assertion that the cause of the internal collapse of British civil society was the capturing of the working classes within a culture of dependency on the state. Paradoxically, he suggests, the welfare state that purported to support and help the poor ultimately only served to rob them of their motivation to work and organise for a better life, thus holding them within a culture of dependency.

This new configuration of state and citizen made the populace a supplicant citizenry dependent on the state rather than themselves, and it aborted indigenous traditions of working-class self help, mutuality and social insurance.... In this way, welfare ceased to function as a safety net through which people could not fall, becoming instead a ceiling through which the supplicant class – cut off from earlier working-class ambition - could not break.(Blond 2010 p.15)

This has led to a situation where the rich become richer through the 'gains' of rampant growth while the poor remain trapped in welfare dependency. Blond suggests that the breakdown of British Society can be seen in three keys area: economic, democratic and social.

The economic collapse is seen most clearly in the debt crisis that is both national and domestic. He cites the lack of domestic savings as an indication that we have become a short termist society. The widely held principle of saving for retirement, of delayed gratification, has been destroyed. Democratically Blond traces the centralisation of political power to Westminster as indicative of a corruption or corrosion of the democratic principle. This leaves ordinary folk disengaged from the political process and their elected representatives. According to Blond the localised civic and community life of Britain has well nigh disappeared. All of this has led to a series of low turnout in general elections, never mind local elections. Blond says:



Parliamentary reform cannot be a substitute for political involvement: it must come as a result of a renewed participation. (p. 69)

Not only is there a marked decline in political capital, but Blond also identifies a decline in social capital. This is marked not least by the huge increase in both alcohol and substance abuse and a related significant rise in criminality. Blond places the blame of all of this clearly at the door of the breakdown of the nuclear family.

Blond is equally bold in where he points the blame for this corrosion of British society. He identifies two factors – 1) contemporary liberalism, and 2) poor third level philosophy teaching! Liberalism he contends is too busy arguing about what is foundational and what isn't. It disregarded any notion of objective truth and embraced at best relativism, which in turn became more oppressive than that which came before (p.142), or at worst the notion that everything was arbitrary. We could describe this as the nihilism of post-foundationalism. He goes on:

Happily convinced by the radical import of this message, too many of our talented young people give up on the possibility of transformative politics and assiduously work their way into the managerial and governing class of our country. (p. 140)

Blond's analysis is significant as it places contemporary society at a tension between a foundationalism that hasn't worked and is discredited, and a nihilism that is soul-destroying and demeaning of human life. He calls for a restoration of ethos at both individual and societal levels based on a retrieval of virtue.

Blond's research on the UK echoes much of Robert Putman's earlier research in the US at the turn of the millennium (Putnam, 2000) which

showed a clear correlation between economic equality and Social Capital.<sup>10</sup>

Putnam defines Social Capital as a measure of:

- social trust
- engagement with public affairs
- informal sociability
- community organisational life
- volunteerism

Putnam also sees a growing culture of restructuring and outsourcing within workplaces that in turn has led to a loss of employee loyalty and the concept of a secure job for life. This has led to a short-termist attitude among the workforce something that as we shall see Richard Sennett believes to be of great significance. Putnam identified a decline in neighbourly visiting (p.106) and informal socialising (p.108), along with club meetings, committee service, church attendance, philanthropic generosity and electoral turn out (p. 185). Putnam suggests that all forms of civic disengagement are concentrated in the young (p.252). A few things however have bucked the trend, more people are attending spectator sports events and there has been a rise in phone calls and communication via email.

In the UK the New Economics Foundation found that in the first five years of the new millennium six post offices were closed per week and between 1995 and 2000 the UK lost 20% of its most vital community institutions (cornershops etc.) (NEF, 2006). The same report found that 87% of Britons think that society is too materialistic and that levels of trust have halved since the 1950s. It found that 62% of Britons have jobs that they find too stressful or uninteresting and 40% of incapacity benefit claims in the UK are caused by mental illness.

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<sup>10</sup> The use of Putnam's data runs two risks. 1) it feels somewhat dated being well over a decade old and 2) it is a reading of American and not British society which it could be argued is subject to different pressures, so direct translation is not possible. That said, the general picture that he draws I believe can be read from British society in the same period.

All of this has taken place within a culture of free-market foundationalism, and whereas undoubtedly many have gained from the huge advances of the past 30 years it is important to hear the voices of those who haven't. Many would suggest that the social fabric of our society is in an even poorer state than it was during the economic traumas of the 1970s.

### **1.2.2 Numerical & Statistical Auditing**

One of the victories of free-market foundationalism has been its influence on the auditing mechanisms employed in a wide variety of contexts in society – vast amounts of statistical data are produced while the destruction of social cohesion is ignored. Indeed numerical and statistical auditing is one of the central characteristics of the New Capitalism – it is the new foundation, however in its disregard for the reality of any human dynamics it is also nihilistic.<sup>11</sup>

Statistical auditing has its origins in the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham. David Boyle (2001) describes Bentham's approach as extreme, pointing to Bentham's belief that good could be calculated and that everything in the world needed to be measured to calculate its worth. Bentham's disciples John Stuart Mill and John Maynard Keynes both moderated this position.<sup>12</sup> Charles Handy has criticised such approaches calling them 'the fallacy of the single criterion'.

Trying to find one number that is the sum of everything is misguided. There is never any one number that will actually explain success in life and we are foolish to ever to think that it might be there. Money certainly isn't it. Businesses know very well that profit is not the only measure. Sensible organisations now have about 18 different numbers that they look at. Nevertheless, the myth pervades our society that if you are profitable you are successful. Or if you're in the public sector, then efficiency is what matters. But efficiency is not

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<sup>11</sup> The foundation of the National Audit Office in 1983 by the Thatcher government exemplifies this.

<sup>12</sup> David Boyle has for many years been an affiliate of the alternative economic think-tank, the New Economics Foundation

quite the same as effectiveness. You can have a very efficient hospital if you don't take in very sick people or people who are not going to get better, like old ones. So you push them outside. You're efficient but you're not terribly effective. Looking for the one number has corrupted our society. (Handy in Boyle 2001 p.59)

Yet Bentham's ideas did not totally disappear. Boyle cites the Tory party conference of 1954 when it was stated that it would now be possible to plan 'utopia'. This planning was to be based around indicators for growth and strict cost-benefit analysis on all projects. It could be argued that such an approach is still deeply influential to policy making today.

Boyle points out nine weakness of such an approach that are of such significance that they are worth quoting in detail (p.45ff):

1. *You can count people, but you can't count individuals* – such approaches leave no recognition for diversity; no room for people who don't conform and the reality is that people aren't simply average.
2. *"If you count the wrong thing you go backwards"*: Boyle points to the detrimental effect auditing has had on education, with children excluded from exams simply to make league table scores look good; and in the health service complex operations avoided in favour of more straight-forward ones.
3. *"Numbers replace trust, but make measuring even more untrustworthy"*: most people are aware that auditing exposes failure, but most people are also aware that audits do not capture the whole picture of that being audited and so distrust the evidence. Few people then trust the evidence of audits in the long run.
4. *"When numbers fail we get more numbers"*: auditing more things doesn't lead to a clearer picture. When auditing certain things fails simply switching the focus on what is being audited does not solve the problem.
5. *"The more we count, the less we understand"*: Boyle is keen to point out that numbers are not as objective as many think they are. Figures can be

interpreted in a variety of ways and don't lead to an objective unassailable truth.

6. *"The more we actually count, the more unreliable the figures"*: Boyle suggests that many figures 'are an unusual amalgam of the precise and the arbitrary'. (p.51)
7. *"The more we count, the less we can compare the figures"*: he suggests that the correlation of statistics is often illogical and misleading.
8. *"Measurements have a monstrous life of their own"*: targets are used to oppress people.
9. *"When you count things they get worse"*: drawing too much attention to an issue can effect it negatively e.g. people think the main purpose of going to church is to bolster congregational numbers.

Boyle's critique is helpful as it clearly identifies the failures of a foundational approach to numerical and statistical auditing, an approach that is endemic in our society and indeed the Church.

### **1.2.3 Positive Psychology**

Another, and perhaps one of the more bizarre offshoots of the free-market economy, has been its relationship with positive psychology<sup>13</sup>. The overriding and ultimately misplaced optimism of the free-market is that everything is possible - you just have to go and get it. This attitude teaches that the only things that hold us back are our attitudes and ourselves; therefore we must all develop positive attitudes if we are to succeed. The deficiencies of this approach are well charted by Barbara Ehrenreich in her book *Smile or Die* (Ehrenreich, 2009). Ehrenreich describes positive psychology as a tool of manipulation in the hands of big business. She contends that the fundamental problem with positive psychology/thinking is that it is ultimately unrealistic and naive, and misreads complex situations – she asks whether it was positive thinking that encouraged American financial institutions to enter the ludicrous deals that led to the sub-prime mortgage meltdown. Yet it is the experience of many who work in

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<sup>13</sup> It could be argued that Positive Psychology comes from the same modernist mindset that neo-capitalism does – everything is within our grasp if we only want it enough – what capitalism is to economics, positive psychology is to psychology!

organisations that this positive mind-set is demanded of them, even when many of the old securities of employment have disappeared.

#### **1.2.4 New Capitalism and the Corrosion of Character**

The theme of the pressures of the workplace as they evolved to service the New Capitalism is one taken up by Richard Sennett, who explores how the contemporary workplace and working conditions militate against the development of character within individuals, but also in communities (Sennett, 1998). Essentially Sennett's thesis is an examination of the consequences of an extreme fundamentalist form of free-market foundationalism, which as we have already seen paradoxically tips over into post-foundationalist nihilism.

Sennett's analysis begins with the contrast between a father and son. The father worked for the majority of his working life in a stable if not particularly socially-mobile job as an office janitor (p.14ff) whereas his son however worked in the more flexible and mobile world of the New Capitalism, and according to Sennett had not developed anything like the depth of personality, character or indeed humanity of his father. The son had far less job security and was constantly anxious about being made redundant, despite apparently having much greater control over his day-to-day work. He moved job with much greater regularity and this frequently entailed moving house and locality, thus he and his wife's friends were essentially those people they met at work as they had not time to explore or get to know their local community. He feared that his children would share the deep inner lack of rootedness that he experienced as he was anxious that his work life was not the example that he would have liked to set for his children. Sennett concludes that the fundamental characteristic of the New Capitalism is 'flexibility', which while being touted as a virtue actually leads to insecurity and paranoia. The transitory nature of the modern workplace is revealed to be deeply corrosive of the human need to belong and to have a history and a coherent narrative.

Sennett goes on to explore the nature of the 'flexibility' in detail. He suggests that the rejection of routine is at the heart of contemporary attitudes to work. Routine is seen as something demeaning and constrictive 'which can paralyze work or government or other institutions.'(p.32) Yet he acknowledges the continuing debate surrounding the nature of routine. He quotes Adam Smith (Thatcher's favourite economic philosopher) for whom routine was a form of oppression, a casualty of the need for specialisation that is a consequence of (free-market) capitalism:

Character appears to him (*Smith*) shaped by history and its unpredictable twists. Once established, a routine doesn't permit much in the way of personal history; to develop one's character, one has to break out of routine. (p. 38)

Sennett contrasts this with an experience in the contemporary workplace at General Motors where routine served not simply for the management to utilise the workforce, but for the workforce to limit the amount expected of them by the management:

... metrics of time had become something other than an act of repression and domination practiced by management for the sake of the giant industrial organisations' growth.... the rank and file in the union paid close and at times passionate attention to the numbers involved in these negotiations. Routinized time had become an arena in which workers could assert their own demands, an area of empowerment. (p.43)

Sennett admits that the tension over routine has not finally and once-and-for-all been resolved in our time, though the balance is currently tipped in favour of flexibility (p.44).

This flexibility has consequences not simply for the employees of an organisation within the culture of New Capitalism, but for the nature of the

organisations and the way they are lead and managed. Sennett identifies three elements of this flexibility that is required of contemporary organisations; firstly what he calls the 'discontinuous reinvention of institutions', secondly, 'flexible specialization of production', and finally the 'concentration of, without centralisation of, power' (p. 47). The discontinuous reinvention of institutions is experienced as the almost constant need of organisations and institutions to re-invent themselves, to appear fresh, new, sleek and streamlined. But inherent in this is the question as to how much the reinvented organisation is recognisable as the old – is there an inherent continuity or is there a clear break, a 'rupture' (p.48), and how does each of these approaches effect the integrity of the organisation's purpose and product? In order for an organisation to have the greatest flexibility to reinvent itself at will it is necessary for it to have a fairly loose and non-hierarchical structure, thus managerial and structural obliqueness and obscurity have a certain attraction for the leadership of any organisation while making the task of the middle management and general workers all the more difficult. This again induces the constant anxiety of being downsized and the risk of long-term unemployment amongst employees (p. 48/9). Sennett however suggests that there is no evidence that constant self-reinvention by organisations and companies make them any more productive, indeed he says the evidence points to the opposite effect.

We have already seen how specialisation is an intrinsic of the capitalist model of production. Within the New Capitalism that specialism has, like the organisations and companies themselves, to be flexible. In short this requires an ability to respond with speed to emerging external markets. Rather than specialise in a particular product or service, the New Capitalist organisation need to be able to change its products and services to meet the needs and demands of consumers, and thus is more suited to smaller lightweight institutions and opposed to burdensome large organisations (p. 52). Thus the specialisation required becomes less the acquisition of a craft or skill over a lifetime but rather the ability to be a jack-of-all-trades.



Sennett points out that this model at least implies a greater level of employment, in as much as organisations can turn their hands to whatever is demanded, thereby ensuring they remain within a constant stream of demand. The flipside however is transitory employment dependent on market needs and frequently low wages.

Concentration of power without centralisation is familiar to many who work within contemporary organisations. Initially it seems that power is being devolved from the leadership/managerial level to those lower down the organisation. However this doesn't come without strings attached. Firstly the new responsibilities put greater pressure on lower level of the organisations, pressures they may not feel they are adequately equipped or resourced to deal with; and secondly they become victim to copious and often intrusive monitoring procedures from senior management to ensure that the power is being exercised in the 'correct' way and productivity enhanced and increased. This process is widely experienced within the service sector of British society, particular within health and education, where national and local government have apparently devolved power to a more local level. However the experience of practitioners at this level is seldom one of liberation, but of further constraint.

Sennett contends that all these movements are disempowering in the long run for all who work in organisations (that's nearly all of us) and not just those at middle management and shop-floor level. His reflections on observing the Davos Conference are that the characteristics of transience, rootlessness and lack of a history or tradition are all there among the world's most powerful people.

The capacity to let go of one's past, the confidence to accept fragmentation: these are two traits of character which appear at Davos among people truly at home in the new capitalism. They are traits which encourage spontaneity, but here on the mountain such spontaneity is at best ethically neutral. These same traits of character

begetting spontaneity become more self-destructive for those who work lower down in the flexible regime. The three elements of the system of flexible power corrode the characters of more ordinary employees who try to play by these rules. (p.63)

Sennett's identification of fragmentation as a central trait of the new Capitalist project brings us to probably the most comprehensive and acclaimed critic of the contemporary context, Alasdair MacIntyre.

#### 1.2.5 MacIntyre

We have already seen the corrosive effect of the New Capitalism on a coherent history for many individuals and we have identified this as a failure of foundationalism that tips over into a post-foundationalist nihilism. This theme is also apparent in MacIntyre's critique (MacIntyre, 1981). Central to MacIntyre's remedy for moral discourse in society is a renewed attention to history, to tradition. His central critique of modernity is that it has fragmented our moral discourse and thus we are faced with the challenge of reconstructing such a discourse from the remaining fragments. Wilson, in an important reading of MacIntyre for the life of the Church, is keen to clearly differentiate between fragmentation and pluralism. Pluralism implies multiple traditions and communities with coherent and integral histories. Speaking of western culture he says:

MacIntyre argues that characterising our culture in terms of pluralism is misleading and obscures the real challenge that we face. In his analysis, Western culture is fragmented, not pluralistic. It is incoherent; our lives are lived piecemeal, not whole. The disagreements that we have are difficult to resolve because we cannot, locate them within some coherent position or community. We do not live in a world with competing outlooks; we live in a world that has fallen apart. (Wilson 2010 p.17)

Implicit in this is MacIntyre's critique of modernity and, with it, foundationalism. The project of modernity has failed and by implication so has the project of foundationalism and the consequences of this failure has been fragmentation of our moral discourse amongst other things. For MacIntyre to say clearly that pluralism is not the problem reframes the issue and empowers us to tackle the real problem more directly. Wilson points to the error of hiding behind the erroneous diagnosis of pluralism, saying that because it is incorrect, any response we make within the body politic or the Church will be equally erroneous as it will be an attempt to cure a problem we don't have at the expense of grasping the nettle of the problem we do. This may lead to a short term '...appearance of life and health, but it will only be a simulacrum of the church's calling' (p. 19).

This leads us to one of the key features of MacIntyre's argument – the difference between internal and external goods. Internal goods are those which are intrinsic to the action involved, for example the performance of a beautiful piece of music for the music's sake; whereas external goods are those which are coincidental to the activity, in the case of musical performance - fame, more concert bookings, adoring fans etc. MacIntyre's contention is that a fragmented society concentrates more on external goods than internal (MacIntyre, 1981), which in turn leads to the soullessness of society and a breakdown of character.

All this is caused, according to MacIntyre, by the failure of what he calls the Enlightenment Project. He argues that the Enlightenment abandoned Aristotelianism in favour of the foundationalism of an individualised morality. This had led to what he calls emotivism – a state in which all moral pronouncements are considered merely statements of personal preference. Gone is any sense of the common good of teleological endeavour.

MacIntyre develops this theory with his assertion that emotivism produces certain 'characters' within society who identifies as a) the Rich Aesthete, b) the Therapist, and c) the Manager. MacIntyre explains that he is using the

term 'character' is quite a different way to the norm in this context. The 'characters' produced by emotivism are 'imposed from the outside' (p. 29), they are social roles in the broadest sense that individuals feel compelled to put on for recognition by the broader prevailing culture. Time and space preclude a detailed examination of all of these characters here, but it is of note that what they all have in common is arguably a conceptualisation of 'normalisation' that is externally defined – in other words they enable others to make normative for themselves what is demanded by the external culture – the social activist is not a product of emotivism!

Within the broader context of this paper it is perhaps the character of the manager that is of greatest interest, not least because the manager is also a figure of interest for Richard Sennett. Sennett offers a perceptive and crucial deconstruction of contemporary management/leadership, which clearly resonates with his notion of 'concentration of without centralisation of power' that we looked at above; he writes of the contemporary manager:

He or she is a 'leader', the most cunning word in the modern management lexicon; a leader is on your side, rather than your ruler. (Sennett 1998 p.111)

However key to the modern manager/leaders' functioning is the use of teams. Power is devolved to the 'team' that of course absolves the manager/leader of any responsibility. Teamwork is talked up with the unity of the team being paramount – this is how success will be gained, not least because to rock the boat, to ask the awkward question, to complain or to whine will destroy the team dynamic and thus compromise the chances of other team members to get on (p.115). Teamwork becomes the new way to keep the workforce acquiescent. Sennett describes the experience of much team-working as having power without authority and he claims that as such it breeds the 'ironic man' – someone who can never take themselves totally seriously because they realise that the devolved power can at a whim be changed or removed totally – what power an individual may have is that

classic of the New Capitalism, transitory. Sennett sums up the managerial/leadership culture of the New Capitalism thus:

It can divorce flexible experience from static personal ethics... It can divorce easy superficial labor from understanding and engagement... It can make the constant taking of risks an exercise in depression... Irreversible change and multiple, fragmented activity may be comfortable for the new regime's masters, like the court at Davos, but it may disorient the regime's servants. And the new cooperative ethos of teamwork sets in place as masters those 'facilitators' and 'process managers' who dodge truthful engagement with their servants. (p. 117)

Stephen Pattison (1997) has explored the culture of management, claiming that in some instances it takes on an almost religious-like ethos (p.26ff). He identifies as a key function of management the ability to control anxiety particularly in times of organisational change (p.43). It could be argued that the current emphasis on management is but another form of last-ditched foundationalism. Managerial practices seem pretty foundational in most organisations and on them ride the expectation that they will steer a course out of the current chaos (salvation?). Pattison develops what he calls an implicit theology of management:

1. The nature and condition of work should be such as to extract the maximum from the employee.
2. Human beings can control the world and create a better future if they use the right techniques.
3. The world and other people exist for the benefit of organisational survival, exploitation and expansion.
4. The future can be planned and colonised.
5. Everything worth doing can in some way be measured.
6. Relationships are fundamentally hierarchical and require clear lines of upward accountability and downward responsibility.

7. Individuals must be subordinate to the greater goals decided by their superiors. (p.161)

All this points to deeply utilitarian values and it could be argued that the neo-liberalism of the New Capitalism represents the victory of utilitarianism over all else, and indeed this is the core of MacIntyre's argument. He suggests that the Enlightenment project, having rejected the virtue ethics of Aristotelianism, was forced to find a new rationale for the ethics it had inherited and so foundationalism was born. This rationale needed to be more objective than mere 'character' and so emerged the twin rationales of the deontological ethics of Immanuel Kant and the utilitarianism/consequentialism of Jeremy Bentham. This polarised ethical debate between undertaking an action simply because it was the right thing to do regardless of its consequences, and undertaking it because whatever its intrinsic worth as an action, the outcome made it worthwhile. MacIntyre clearly identifies the collapse in moral discourse as stemming from this duality, and the rejection of the apparently non-rational, non-scientific character-based tradition of Aristotle. He is equally clear that the only way to re-imagine our moral discourse is through reclaiming the Aristotelian tradition.

MacIntyre suggest that this is achieved by a new emphasis on 'practices' and the habituation of good conduct and right action – virtue ethics<sup>15</sup>. We shall examine in significant detail later in this thesis what this might mean and how it might work. Suffice it to say that MacIntyre's solution for the corrosion of character that we have tracked so far is not the imposition of external criteria, be they Kantian or the utilitarianism of neo-liberal economics as seen in the New Capitalism, but rather the formation of an internal conscience through habituated virtuous practice. This, it should be added, is not to completely preclude deontological or utilitarian ethics that have their place in forming virtuous practice, simply to say that the practices of a virtue tradition will predominate.

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<sup>15</sup> Though curiously MacIntyre rejects the title of Virtue Ethicist for himself

## **1.3 Foundationalism, Character and the Church**

### **1.3.1 Foundationalism**

The utilitarianism that we have identified as a central part of the project of the New Capitalism and which has been so corrosive of character within society is also in evidence within the Church. Increasingly, as the Church of England faces up to its continued numerical decline, much of its policy-making and discourse has become based on a utilitarian foundationalism of growth. This perhaps came to prominence in the Decade of Evangelism but has grown in intensity since then. Like the secular world the church has adopted growth as its prevailing metaphor. This is often tempered with a suggestion that spiritual growth is as desirable as numerical growth, but this doesn't really disguise the anxiety about numerical decline and its implications. This centralising of the growth metaphor was made explicit in the Archbishop of Canterbury's address to the first meeting of the new General Synod in November 2010. He identified the three main themes for the work of the synod in its five-year term, the first being:

To take forward the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church of England... (Archbishops' Council 2011)

It should be said that in the hands of a skilled theologian such as Rowan Williams it's difficult not to be at least slightly sympathetic to this approach, perhaps because it is contextualised by the former Archbishop within the need to build capacity to serve local communities and the nation. Either way what this shows is the on-going centrality of the growth metaphor, for better or for worse. This use of growth as foundational I would suggest is the overarching paradigm in the contemporary church and with it has come the corrosion of character that we have witnessed within the secular world's failed obsession with growth as its prevailing metaphor.

In less skilful hands the overpowering nature of the metaphor and its destructive power is clear - anecdotal evidence of a recent Deanery Synod in

a Church of England Diocese recorded the fact that when synod members were asked to give examples of their 'passionate spirituality' (a term borrowed from the Natural Church Development programme of Christian Swartz, itself a product of the church growth movement), or to simply describe what they felt their church was passionate about, the most common response was 'getting them in' and 'building good relationships with the local community'<sup>17</sup>. While in the final analysis there may be nothing wrong in trying to encourage more people to attend worship or still less to develop good relationships with the local community, these responses demonstrate a theological vacuum of staggering proportions. In addition to not understanding the term 'spirituality' and confusing it with evangelism, this snapshot of the contemporary Church of England revealed a total lack of ability in congregations to do even the most basic theological reflection in relation to their motivation or mission - all that was left was a utilitarian need to 'get them in' - though the purpose of so doing was never made clear, though presumably it was to bolster the flagging spirits of existing congregations and to have more money to pay the bills.

However before we go on and examine the nature and implications for the church of the foundationalist utilitarianism that is both explicit and implicit in current polity, we need to recognise that a utilitarian foundationalism of growth is not the only foundationalism in play. As we recognised in our examination of the implications of the New Capitalism, foundationalism has a habit of spawning and fragmenting at great speed. It is as if there is a neurotic search in our generation to find what is foundational that allows individuals and organisations to flit from one foundational metaphor to another. This search for what is foundational has led to an increased polarisation within the church (and society) as individuals and organisations nail their colours to particular foundational masts. Extremes of church-style or tradition within Anglicanism have become more rigid most particularly within Anglo-Catholicism (through organisations such as Forward in Faith and culminating in a significant exodus of clergy and

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<sup>17</sup> Warwick & Leamington Deanery Synod 16.04.2012



people from this tradition to the Roman Catholic Ordinariate) and within Evangelicalism (through organisations such as Anglican Mainstream and Reform). What this would seem to evidence is a loss of sacramental understanding of both faith and the Church (in both traditions, including so-called catholic sacramentality) and a literalisation of Scripture, Tradition and the Church in the name of a rediscovered foundationalism.

Never lurking far below in this polarised Church are issues of soteriological understanding. Gerard Mannion identifies what he calls a 'neo-exclusivism' emerging within the contemporary church (Mannion, 2007). Implicit and often explicit in this is the notion of 'winning people for Christ' or at least that the subscription to a particular mode of perceived orthodoxy is required for eternal salvation, the other option being eternal damnation. The requirements of this neo-exclusive foundationalism vary depending on where you are in the Church but include biblical inerrancy, sacramental integrity, being born again in the Spirit, or indeed radical inclusiveness.

The next chapter will examine in greater detail the nature of this foundationalism and why the Church feels the need to embrace it in its various forms with such great urgency. Suffice it is say here that it mirrors the search for secure moorings represented by the market based models of the New Capitalism and the statist models that co-exist with them. As we saw above both these models are rooted in the drive to power and control within an uncertain environment<sup>18</sup>

It is the contention of this thesis however that authenticity and integrity are more significant factors in enabling the Church to fulfil its role in society and that neo-exclusive foundationalisms further undermine the role of the Church rather than bolstering it. But before we examine why this might be the case, we will examine in more details the most dominant

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<sup>18</sup>For a fuller exploration of this theme see Percy M. 1998. *Power and the Church - ecclesiology in an age of transition*, London, Cassell.

foundationalism in the contemporary church, that of the church growth movement.

### **1.3.2 The Church Growth Movement**

The great paradox of the Church Growth movement is that its origins are not in theological or ecclesial discourse at all, but rather derive from the positive thinking movement which itself had its origins in the New Thought of Phineas Quimby via Norman Vincent Peale and his successors (Ehrenreich, 2009). Ehrenreich traces the emergence of the stream of American Christianity to a reaction against the Calvinism sweeping America in the 19th century. This version/mutation of Christianity was to prove highly popular and remains so today:

By any quantitative measure, the most successful preachers today are the positive thinkers, who no longer mention sin and usually have little to say about the standard whipping boys of the Christian right, abortion and homosexuality. Gone is the threat of hell and the promise of salvation, along with the grim story of Jesus' torment on the cross; in fact, the cross has been all but banished from the largest and most popular temples of the new evangelism, the mega-churches. Between 2001 and 2006 the number of mega-churches – defined as having a weekly attendance of 2000 or more – doubled to 1,210, giving them a combined congregation of nearly 4.4 million.bv(Ehrenreich, 2009, p.124)

Ehrenreich goes on to delineate a 'spirituality' where positive thinking meets the prosperity gospel - God wants us to have what we want, and all we've got to do it to want it enough (p.125ff). Ehrenreich quotes Joyce Meyer:

I believe that God wants to give us nice things. (p.140)

This is almost a direct replica of the approach we saw in many contemporary secular organisations - this is the organisation / church / individual that plans its own future, which feels able to determine and control everything it is part of. Such positive theology stands not as a counter-cultural challenge to the prevailing status quo, but rather is shaped and formed by it, indeed is parasitic of it.

Indeed the similarities between the corporate environment and the ecclesial one are deliberately played up. These churches deliberately meet in non-ecclesiastical looking buildings, frequently on retail or industrial parks. The amount of Christian imagery is minimal:

... the mega churches by and large scuttled all the icons and symbols of conventional churches – crosses, steeples, and images of Jesus. Crosses, in particular, ...might affect the unchurched as they do vampires: they could intimidate or frighten visitors. (p.138)

Indeed Ehrenreich goes on to describe the leaders of such mega-churches as 'pastorpreneurs' (p.140). She traces a reciprocal tendency that as mega-churches become more like corporations, so the CEOs of corporations become more like mega-church pastors – charismatic personalities and motivational extraverts (p.144). And yet there is a dark side to all of this positivity as it is unable to integrate failure or lack of enthusiasm, indeed it is challenged and offended by them.

But always, in a hissed undertone, there is the darker message that if you don't have all that you want, if you feel sick, discouraged, or defeated, you have only yourself to blame. Positive theology ratifies and completes a world without beauty, transcendence, or mercy.(p. 146)

The influence of the positive thinking/theology movement and the prosperity gospel are clearly in evidence within the Church Growth

movement in the UK. A central inspiration to this movement in the UK is the work of Bob Jackson, formerly a Research Missioner for Springboard, the Archbishops' Initiative for Evangelism and more recently Archdeacon of Walsall in the Diocese of Lichfield. Jackson's two major works *Hope for the Church* (2002) and *The Road to Growth* (2005) remain significant texts for a wide range of policy makers in the Church. Currently Lichfield diocese, (Jackson's old diocese) has as its strap line 'Going for Growth', and the diocese of London has commissioned him to do a major piece of work following up a 2003 project entitled 'Another Capital Idea'.<sup>19</sup> Aspects of Jackson's proposals, especially his suggested method of parish share calculation (or variations on it), have been taken up by a number of dioceses across the country.

Jackson's collation and reading of the evidence is significant and helpful, however his proposed remedies illustrate the clear influence of positive theology/prosperity gospel. Jackson's background is as a government economic advisor prior to Margaret Thatcher. His corporate approach is manifest most clearly in what he calls The Cycle of Growth that seeks to renew the relationship between (diocesan) centres, the clergy and parishes. The diagram carries the legend:

Increase sales > make a profit > invest in production > increase sales  
(Jackson, 2005 p.13)

Within some contexts such an approach would be entirely logical and appropriate, however as we shall see as we explore aspects of it in more details below, such an approach is not adequate to drive the renewal of the Church - it is simply too unambitious and unimaginative. The utilitarian foundations of the Church Growth movement seek purely to increase the amount of product shifted, to regain numerical strength (and with it influence), to re-establish the Christian culture that it is claimed was once

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<sup>19</sup> Notwithstanding what has been discussed already, one presumes that this is not intended as an economic pun! More seriously, Jackson's inclusion is key as he is by far the preeminent spokesman for the Church Growth movement in the UK.

dominant in the UK and is now perceived to have been lost. The Church Growth movement, despite its contemporary cutting-edge packaging is a restorationist movement. The claim of this thesis is that by retaining and developing its inherent authenticity and integrity the church will be led into a significantly new relationship with the society in which it is situated.

Alan Billings critiqued Jackson's work in an article in the Church Times in November 2006 (Billings, 2006). His contention based on his reading of Dr. Peter Brierley's English Church Census 2005 was that church growth in one place precipitated church decline in another.<sup>20</sup> Billings suggested that church growth in particular congregation was predicated on them drawing members from other churches and not on new converts, a claim hotly contested by Jackson in a letter a few weeks later. Certainly the Church Growth movement has ridden on the back of a growing consumerism within the church. Perhaps more serious implications for the already weakened parish system can be found in Jackson's proposal for parish share calculations. Jackson claims that the old system whereby larger churches effectively subsidised smaller ones through the share system as leading to inefficiency (Jackson, 2005 p.163). He also suggests that such a system acts as a tax on growth (p.165). Large successful churches should be allowed to use their resources to further develop their ministries - smaller ones just have to make do. This of course is quite clearly the law of the free-market. What happens in reality in this situation is that large usually suburban, middle-class churches, where there are often considerable lay resources and not massively heavy demands on priestly/sacramental ministry, flourish where smaller rural or inner-city or housing estate churches with limited lay resources and where professional ministry is desperately needed are left to struggle. In these circumstances the market-based positive theology/thinking based philosophy of the church growth movement does

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Brierley's work is a good example of the importation of numerical auditing into the life of the Church. The fact that Church House in Westminster has a statistics unit is another. It should however be said that statistics themselves are morally neutral – what is of concern is how they are understood and used.

indeed bring growth to some at the cost of the others. We are left with the question - is this an appropriate way for the Church to do its business?

### **1.3.3 Commodification of the Gospel**

For the church growth movement generally, and for Bob Jackson in particular, 'bums on seats' matter. The entire second chapter of *Hope for the Church* (Jackson, 2002) is devoted as to why this is important, however the theological assumptions that he makes to justify this position are open to critique. Jackson first explores the difference between the church and the kingdom - seeing the church as a 'pilot project or base camp' for the kingdom (p.18). Yet he is clear in the need for a numerically strong church:

The smaller and more dispirited that community becomes, the fewer people who enter it, the less use it is to the kingdom. (p.18)

This quotation begs all sorts of questions - firstly the conflation of small and dispirited. While this is certainly true in some settings I suspect that it is not true in many. Indeed Hemming has suggested that notwithstanding the breakup of civil society and the decline in membership of the voluntary groups that facilitate it, small pressure groups have emerged as being socially dynamic forces (Hemming, 2011). It might well be that a small contextually responsive church is of far greater use to the Kingdom than a large monolithic body.

His second argument addresses the 'quality not quantity' issue. Here he draws on scripture quoting Jesus' parable of the mustard seed and identifies the mustard seed as something that is capable of extraordinary growth, as well as the injunction to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send labourers into his harvest field (p.19). While his reading of the mustard seed analogy is open to a variety of interpretations itself, Jackson ignores other biblical analogies that offer a different model, not least the leaven in the lump - a small amount of yeast acts as a transforming agent both on its

surroundings and on itself - the church and the world will be transformed in the image of the Kingdom.

This 'small is beautiful' philosophy has significant resonance in contemporary society not least in the field of alternative economics where it was pioneered by E F Schumacher (1993). Jackson is not convinced. He gives a number of salient examples of where the small church has indeed been effective - the pre-Constantinian empire and the role of the small Confessing Church in Nazi Germany. He goes on to admit that there are plenty of examples where nations with significant church-going populations have not seemed to benefit much for this phenomenon, but argues that this is not an argument for a smaller church, rather for a church that is 'both large *and* faithful' (Jackson, 2002 p.20)

Jackson seeks to explore one more argument against the foundationalism of church growth –that the church primarily exists for the benefit of others. This position, as Jackson points out, sees the church as there to serve the wider society and not to simply 'market itself' (p.20). For Jackson this is sleepwalking towards the loss of influence. The church, he suggests, is an agent of the Kingdom and the primary purpose of that agency '...is that which is most precious to Christians - the eternal love of God in Christ found in the worshipping, kingdom-building life of the Christian community.' (p.21). In short, to care for others and the wider society the church needs members.

While disagreeing with many of his proposed remedies, not least the foundationalism of church growth, I would suggest that Jackson's analysis of church decline needs to be taken seriously. He suggest that one of the main reasons why it isn't is because church leaders (bishops and clergy) are afraid to admit to failure publically and indeed tend to internalise and personalise the perceived failure rather than recognise it as systemic. (p.22).

Jackson's books were written before the crushing collapse of the growth metaphor within global capitalism and thus were unable to reflect on how growth as a metaphor used in this way doesn't deliver all it promises. Indeed it is a truism to say that all not growth is good, indeed some forms of growth are pathological, and some growth is cancerous. There are some glaring omissions in Jackson's argument. He disregards the experience of churches in cultures that are not historically Christian, or indeed the experience of Anglican churches in non-established contexts.

At the conclusion of this chapter, Jackson makes a helpful claim. He claims that quantitative growth will be a by-product of qualitative growth. In his exposition of this, Jackson finds it hard to leave behind the language of consumerism and capitalism. In this final chapter of *Hope for the Church* entitled 'Renewing the Spiritual Heart' he speaks of the church having an 'unbeatable product' in a 'competitive marketplace' (p.186-7). This is perhaps final proof of the commodification of faith within the Church Growth movement. Ultimately faith, as product or commodity, is contextualised within a marketplace mentality. I suggest that the Church needs to make a bolder claim - that the marketplace can (and indeed must) be contextualised by the life of faith. However the process of the commodification of faith and indeed that of the Church as marketplace is well established within the contemporary Church of England, though the full extent of this may not be recognised.

#### **1.3.4 Organisational Reconfiguration**

We saw above Richard Sennett's contention that one of the facets of the New Capitalism was the demand for a new flexibility within institutions so that they can respond to the ever-changing environment in which they exist. Sennett identified three aspects to this:

- the discontinuous reinvention of institutions
- flexible specialisation of production



- concentration of, without centralisation of, power (Sennett 1998 p.47)

All three of these characteristics can be seen in the contemporary church. The 'flexible specialisation of production' has its ecclesial counterpart in the tension between parochial and associational churches. Associational churches are not a new invention within the Church of England and have traditionally catered for particular liturgical styles of worship. Congregation members have eschewed their local parish churches to worship at a church more to their liking. Generally this has happened within large urban areas, whereas rural areas have retained a more traditional and quintessentially Anglican parochial model of ministry, though this model by no means unknown in some urban areas.

With the onset of the commodification of faith and the ensuing consumerist approaches to it, the process of churches developing an associational character as opposed to a parochial one has quickened. Churches are increasingly identified by the internal agenda of their liturgical/theological style as opposed to their parochial setting and their service thereof. The implications of this are complex and by no means straightforward. Perhaps the most significant study remains that by Ecclestone et al (1988) who examines the psychodynamics surrounding a community's relationship to the parish church. Again this is complex, however Ecclestone concludes that while psychodynamically the parochial model is to be preferred, the associational model can effectively minister to a geographic area (Tiller, 1988).

The number of Anglican churches with an associational identity was given a huge boost with the publication of the report *Mission-Shaped Church* (2004). This influential report proposed the planting of churches for specific target groups in specific places regardless of the legalities of parochial boundaries etc. This was a bold and radical step and for many represented a discontinuity with what had gone before (Sennett's first point) not least

because the theological rationale for such a development was thinly expressed in the report. At its best it initiated the 'mixed economy' spoken of by Rowan Williams, at worse it has sped up and legitimised the fragmentation of the Church of England.

The practical outworking for the Mission-Shaped Church (MSC) report has been through the Fresh Expressions of Church movement, which is a diverse and varied movement about which it is difficult to generalise<sup>22</sup>. Fresh Expressions, at it is generally known, has grown and developed considerably since its inception. What is of greatest concern within this movement is the emphasis on forms of church for particular types of people - the Homogeneous Unit Principle, a theory developed by the father of the church growth movement Donald McGavran (2004) . This is associational church in extremis and it is difficult to see it as anything other than a fragmenting of the wider church. Bishop Graham Cray's assertion that we need to live with this temporary fragmentation until those who have been reached by these new forms of church feel able to integrate into the mainstream is not validated by experience thus far.

However, Fresh Expressions, though originally conceived as part of a utilitarian foundationalism of church growth, seems to have at least in some contexts, cast aside that agenda and begun to explore how the church in this generation can rediscover a new authenticity and integrity in its worship, common life and mission. This positive development challenges the oft heard criticisms of associational churches and of the MSC report - that the church has ceased to be a church and has become a sect no longer concerned with the well-being of the wider society, but simply with a concern for its own survival – an accusation that, while this may be true of some Fresh Expressions, it is not true for many.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Nelstrop, L. & Percy, M. (Eds.) 2008. *Evaluating Fresh Expressions - explorations in emerging church*, London: Canterbury Press.

<sup>23</sup> See Croft, S. & Spellers, S. 2010. *Ancient Faith, Future Mission: Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition*, Church Publishing, Inc. and CRAY, G. 2010. *Ancient Faith: Future Mission New Monasticism as Fresh Expressions of Church*, Canterbury Press.

It may be that the pioneering spirit behind Fresh Expressions movement has enabled it to avoid the fragmentation that has beset so much of the wider church as the Church has both consciously and unconsciously reconfigured itself. As mentioned above, much of that reconfiguration has been toward extremes, the markers in the sand being for many, gender and sexuality. These issues have pushed the traditional Anglican polity of 'unity in diversity' to its absolute limits, indeed some would claim, beyond. No longer is there a unity based on a tolerant mutual acceptance, rooted not in doctrinal agreement but in common liturgical practice, but rather an overt and public struggle for the heart and identity of Anglicanism - the diversity has become toxic, character has been corroded.

#### **1.3.5 Managerialism**

The final way that we will examine the influence and effect of the New Capitalism on the Church is through the uncritical adoption of a culture of managerialism within the church. As with many of the issues we have examined so far, there is nothing per se wrong with good management, indeed God is not glorified by bad management - it is more a question of how and why. The managerial improvements recommended by Jackson and others will most probably make the church a more *efficient* organisation - the question is whether or not they will make it more *effective*. This question however is a difficult one to answer because the church growth movement offers no teleology other than more 'bums on seats'.

This is an entire culture is based on numerical auditing - the relative strength of an organisation can be measured by the number of customers it has. Hence the annual angst as the church attendance figures are published and then again when the number crunchers such as Peter Brierley and Lynda Barley offer their analysis. Our reading of Boyle above illustrates the futility of such an approach - numbers may measure people but not individuals, they don't measure love or the quality of relationships, they don't measure self-giving sacrifice or compassion or low-level everyday acts

of random kindness. A church that assesses its effectiveness on such figures is in real danger of spiritual, theological and missional bankruptcy. It is simply measuring the wrong things.

Jackson places great importance on what he calls 'delivering the human resources for growth' (p.111) - the selection, training and support of clergy. His concern is that current procedures have not served the church well. Like so much of Jackson's thesis his analysis is cogent however his prescription is constrained by the teleology of 'bums on seats'. Jackson proposes an aggressive campaign to recruit younger ordinands because the evidence is clear - younger clergy lead younger seemingly more dynamic congregations. What is absent from Jackson's is any engagement with the notion of vocation or of holiness and wisdom in clergy (or leaders), or indeed the lived experience that often the most unlikely leaders effect the most significant changes. His approach remains consistently utilitarian. He writes:

For the efficient working and growth of the Church of England, the most able clergy should probably lead the largest churches. (p.127)

It is difficult to find a scriptural rationale for this approach. If the church's ministry is modelled on the example of Jesus in the New Testament, such an approach needs to be severely questioned. This is a clear example of the corrosion of character that the uncritical application of secular capitalist models into the life of the church. Pattison's implicit theology of management that we examined above rings true here. Jackson's approach sees the purpose of individuals within the organisation (the church) as to purely serve the needs of the organisation. Lost is any prophetic capability to speak against prevailing trends and, as we have already explicitly seen above, lost is any notion of the church and its ministers giving its life for the life of the world. Lost, indeed in Jackson's model, is any ministerial theology of the cross.

### **1.3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to identify the impact and influence of the utilitarian foundationalism of the New Capitalism on society and, through its indiscriminate adoption consciously and unconsciously within the Church. We have seen its corrupting influence in society through the foundationalist approaches of statism and the unbridled market economics of the New Capitalism. We have seen how the utilitarianism of Bentham has developed into the current obsession with numerical and statistical auditing and through the work of David Boyle seen how this is of very limited value and ultimately potentially misleading. We have explored the influence of the positive thinking movements, managerialism and the organisational reconfiguration that this new foundationalism has pre-empted. In all of this we have been able to clearly identify the presence of and implications of these dynamics within the life of the church, and we have seen how this utilitarian foundationalism has corroded character and wellbeing both within society but has also within the church, leading to a situation where these criteria have become normative for the church in some places rather than theological reflection on the gospel.

Before we can offer remedies for this situation it is necessary to understand the deeper philosophical and psychodynamic currents that have led to this current situation, and it is to those that we turn our attention in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2 Individuation and the Recovery of Virtue

We have seen how foundationalist approaches have led to a corrosion of character both within society and within the church and we have examined the evidence of this in some detail. We will now examine some of the theoretical principles that underscore this corrosion.

### 2.1 Freedom

Murphy (2007) identifies the origins of Foundationalism in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, epitomised by that of Descartes. Implicit in the Enlightenment approach was a reliance on the empirical basis of truth - everything of value could be proven and shown to be valuable by evidence. This has three implications that will be of interest to us; firstly, it led to the drive to root everything on principles that could be seen as foundational, everything of worth had to be able to demonstrate what it was based on; secondly, it encouraged a culture of human narcissism; and thirdly it revealed a latent and hidden fear of not-knowing, a fear of freedom. The reality was that, liberated from both economic and intellectual feudalism, society simply swapped one form of oppression for another.

This dynamic was well drawn by Isaiah Berlin in his essay *The Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958). At the heart of Berlin's analysis were two differing conceptions of liberty or freedom. Negative liberty was seen as essentially passive – it...

...involves an answer to the question: 'What is the area within which the subject — a person or group of persons — is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons. (Berlin, 1958).

However the concept of Positive liberty was more active and therefore more open to abuse. It contained the belief that there was an objective liberty/freedom/ good to which all people should aspire and that everything

possible should be done to enable them to achieve this. Berlin points up the fact that historically this approach led to one group of people enforcing their conception of liberty onto others - you *will* be free, even if you don't want to be! This is most clearly manifest in liberation movements who when they achieve power become oppressive ones e.g. most forms of state communism, Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe etc. Adam Curtis (2007) develops this argument to say that he believes that this is what has happened in Britain, particularly during the Thatcher administration. In a move to rid British society of the control of old oligarchies, be they aristocratic, entrepreneurial or trade union, the so-called 'objective' force of the market was invoked. It was thought that this would be a move towards freedom and liberty – the New Capitalism would rid society and the economy of vested interest. However this would prove to be an example of Berlin's 'positive' liberty – the swapping of one form of oppression for another – the free-market and its attendant regulatory and auditing processes have proved to be every bit as oppressive as that which went before. Indeed the perceived oppression of the former oppressive oligarchies was at least human, whereas the new oppressors appear to be statistical audits. Here again we see the de-humanisation of the workforce and society in general. Curtis is clear that for Berlin the nature of positive liberty is not all bad, indeed this thesis will echo their call for some commonly held conception of the common good as being essential for the healthy functioning of individuals and society. To use the language of Erich Fromm, which we will examine in more detail below, Berlin charts the achievement of 'freedom *from*' and the failure to achieve 'freedom *to*'. Such I suggest is the achievement of the Enlightenment and its legacy - it has delivered freedom from one set of economic and intellectual vested interests, but merely replaced it with subjugation to another set, as evidenced in the previous chapter.

## **2.2 Fromm**

All of this begs the question - why? Why are we individually and corporately as a society so fearful of freedom that we draw back from the brink when we look like we might achieve it? This question was examined in some detail by

the social psychologist Erich Fromm in his book *The Fear of Freedom* (1942).<sup>24</sup> As we have already seen, Fromm differentiates between 'freedom *from*' and 'freedom *to*', and suggests that freedom *from* alone which doesn't develop into a freedom *to* leads to a greater feeling of isolation and aloneness and potentially feelings of emptiness and anxiety. Ultimately freedom *from* must be balanced with freedom *to* in terms of meaningful relationships and work:

.... man, the more he gains freedom in the sense of emerging from the original oneness with man and nature and the more he becomes an 'individual', has no choice but to unite himself with the world in spontaneity of love and productive work or else to seek a kind of security by such ties with the world as destroy his freedom and the integrity of his individual self. (Fromm 1942 p.18)

We need to take seriously the alternative that Fromm suggests to the successful achievement of freedom *to* because it is in this territory that we can identify some of the deeper causes of the corrosion of character we have been exploring. The failure to develop a freedom *to* becomes pathological, and as a social psychologist Fromm maps that pathology in considerable detail.

Fromm roots the lack of ability and motivation to develop a freedom *to* in a fear of failure (Fromm 1976) - the safety of subjugation is preferable to the unknowns of freedom. Indeed Fromm goes so far as to describe this as an 'escape' from freedom, and he details how this escape manifests itself in three primary ways (Fromm, 1942):

**1. Authoritarianism:** Fromm wrote *Escape for Freedom* in the years leading up to the Second World War. He identified the aligning of personality to a 'greater power' or authority as an escape from self-actualisation. In this approach the individual sees themselves as powerful by association with a

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<sup>24</sup> Fromm's importance as an interlocutor is address in the Introduction to this thesis.



more powerful figure. In the case of Nazi Germany this was of course Adolf Hitler, though this 'power by proxy' can be identified in certain forms of religious belief. This power is then used as a means to achieve superiority over those the individual or group perceives as their enemies.

Within the contemporary Church this aligning of certain individuals groups and sub-groups with external authority structures is clearly visible. It can be seen in certain forms of Anglo-Catholicism whose identification with the Church of Rome is frequently used as a justification to criticise the perceived weakness of Anglican polity. Recently this approach has achieved its zenith in the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham set up by Pope Benedict XVI that allows disaffected Anglicans to come into full communion with the See of Rome while retaining certain aspects of their 'patrimony'. What has yet to emerge is whether this move will be a freedom *to* or simply a freedom *from* manoeuvre. If the primary purpose of the identification with Rome while in the Church of England was self-definition over and against the prevailing polity, then what will the members of the Ordinariate use to define themselves over-and-against the part of the Roman Church that they do not like? Or will the very hinterland between Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism provide an adequate dynamic of self-definition over-and-against each other.

Yet such identification with authoritarian structures is not the sole preserve of conservative Anglo-Catholics or indeed theological conservatives generally. Within the Church of England there remain those for whom the hope for the Church can best be found in the models of mega-churches generally imported from the United States, Willow Creek being perhaps the best known example. Once again this model, albeit authoritarian in a different way, functions in the same way within the church. It provides an external (or at least separate) reference point with which to identify and from which to address those inside the Church from a perceived position of enhanced power. It is this dynamic that Fromm identifies as central to Authoritarianism. While many of the focuses used for this form of

identification are external, some can be sub-groups of the wider church e.g. 'bible-believing Christians', 'Affirming Catholics'; 'the Prayer Book Society'; 'Greenbelt-ers', etc.

**2. Destructiveness:** Though similar in many ways, this approach contrasts with Authoritarianism by seeing power as a limited commodity. In the Authoritarian model an individual or group of individuals can experience themselves as powerful by association with an external power, be it individual or corporate. In the 'destructive' approach (Fromm's use of the term differs in some ways from its more common usage) power is needed to be experienced more tangibly, thus if an individual or group want it they need to wrest it from those who already have it. Within the Church this is manifest in a number of ways, primarily and most obviously in the jockeying for position in terms of synodical elections and episcopal appointments. Recent elections to General Synod revealed significant lobbying amongst differing camps/groups all seeking to influence some potentially significant and long-term legislation coming before Synod in this quinquennium.

The other clearest manifestation of destructiveness is the wresting of power by non-cooperation with those in power. Classically within the Church this is seen in the withholding of parish share as a means of making political points. Many bishops are only too aware of how a small number of large churches in their dioceses hold the financial health of the diocese in their hands. Both aspects of the 'destructive' approach were seen recently in the diocese of Southwark, where conservative evangelical parishes began to withhold parish share in protest about the seemingly uniform appointments of liberals to senior positions in the diocese.

**3. Automaton Conformity:** This is in many ways quite different from the other two in as much as it is more passive than proactive, though it is possible to discern echoes of the power by association of Authoritarianism within it. It deals with perceived aloneness and isolation through merging with a large crowd and adopting the values, appearances and practices of

the larger group uncritically, simply as a means to belong. The paradox of this position according to Fromm is that it destroys our individuality. Much of the argument of this thesis is that the Church (of England) has been guilty of automaton conformity in recent years and that this has seriously undermined its mission and role in society. This automaton conformity encompasses not only the Church's captivity to the New Capitalism, but in its whole engagement with contemporary culture. Indeed it could be argued that large parts of the Church have simply failed to engage with contemporary culture, but have rather capitulated to it. This can be seen in certain aspects of the Church's worship, not least where it has abandoned liturgical practice entirely, and its fairly unsophisticated engagement with musical culture, both contemporary and historical. I (along with Fromm) am not arguing that capitulation to contemporary culture alone is a bad thing, but rather that capitulation or automaton conformity to *any* culture, be it contemporary or inherited, is a falling short of the Church in its task.

The challenge for the Church is to realise that it has in its very being, the freedom *for* 'engagement'. That this need not be about the bolstering of a weak institutional/personal ego by the power by association of Authoritarianism, nor the overt seeking of political power of Destructiveness, nor indeed to capitulation to prevailing mores and cultures of Automaton Conformity. While these approaches may represent freedom *from*, they do not represent the achievement of a freedom *to*. In order to achieve this the Church must regain its confidence to engage without having to dominate. This I will argue is about the retrieving of ecclesial character. Fromm uses psychoanalytic terminology, which I will also draw on throughout this thesis to make the same point. For Fromm the individuals and groups within society need to become 'individuated' (p.19f). So by extension the need for the church is for it to embrace a process of individuation and to rejoice in and develop its individuality, not in any exclusivist sense, but rather in a manner that facilitates engagement with the society in which it is placed in a spirit of confidence and mutual respect. Yet this will not be cost free, as Pruyser notes:

"At this point we should heed Fromm's ominous message. Is the ability to tolerate freedom a neurotic trait? Fromm thinks so, noting that freedom comes at a price: it demands hard mental and moral work, it isolates the individual in moments of personal decision-making, and it may alienate him from the masses. While freedom is pleasant, it is also taxing, if only because it demands vigilance towards the outer world and a good deal of self-knowledge. It requires limitation of some impulses and the capacity to deal with certain gratifications. And so freedom can be squandered away or sold for a mess of pottage." (Pruyser 1991b, p.53)

We will explore how the Church might engage with its own individuation in due course, however before we do that we must continue to draw on the wisdom of Erich Fromm who has still more to teach us as we try to understand the roots of the current corrosion of character within both society and the Church.

#### **2.2.1 Acquisitiveness & Ontology**

In 1976, four years before his death, Fromm published *To Have or To Be?* (1976). It is possible to read this text as a valedictory statement, summing up a life's work and wisdom. In it Fromm revisits and develops some of the themes we have already encountered in *The Fear of Freedom*. The central theme of the text is a contrast between an acquisitive and an ontological orientation within society. From a Marxist, Jewish-humanist perspective, Fromm's reflections are impressively theologically literate, drawing on both Old and New Testaments as well as on the writings of the German medieval mystic Meister Eckhart.

Like many before him, Fromm identifies the Enlightenment, the utilitarianism that was one of its products and ultimately the Industrial Revolution as offering a promise of abundance and progress, a promise that in the end did not deliver. As we have seen it promised freedom from both

economic and intellectual feudalism "... a new earthly city of progress must replace the city of God" (Fromm, 1976). Fromm attributes the failure of this to the centrality of both what he calls radical hedonism and egotism within the new culture. He defines radical hedonism as the notion "... that the aim of life is happiness, that is maximum pleasure, defined as the satisfaction of any desirous objective need a person may feel...." (p.2) For Fromm it is the mistaken notion that satisfaction of personal greed leads to harmony and peace that is at the root of modernist society's problems.

At the heart of this is a tension between possession and being. The hedonistic lifestyle is based on the understanding that I am what I have - I am to be judged by my possessions, without which I am nothing. Correspondingly the more I possess, the more I have, the more important I must be. While the material implications of such a statement are clear and far-reaching, we should not limit our understanding of acquisitiveness to material items. I would suggest that the foundationalism and utilitarianism we explored in the previous chapter are deeply acquisitive at heart - 'if my philosophy has clear and substantial empirically provable foundations, then it must be a superior philosophy to yours which is less concrete'. This approach is so deeply engrained in our thinking, in society, in our culture and in our daily lives that we hardly notice it - it seems obvious - the truth is evidence-based. Now it would be absurd not to contend that there is a form of truth that is evidence-based, however it would also be equally (though less obviously in our society) absurd to limit our conception of truth to evidence, not least in the complex relationship between truth and beauty. Key for our understanding at this point is that our society is predominately acquisitive in orientation, almost to the exclusion of any understanding of ontology ... and that the Church is not untouched by this!

Fromm traces some of the implications of this - he suggests that acquisitiveness leads to a system whereby the rich get richer and the poor get poorer as they are sacrificed to fuel the greed of large organisations:

The suffering of the workers as well as the destruction of an ever-increasing number of smaller enterprises for the sake of the growth of ever larger corporations was an economic necessity that one might regret, but that one had to accept as if it were the outcome of a natural law. The development of this economic system was no longer determined by the question: *what is good for man?* But by the question: *what is good for the growth of the system?* One tried to hide the sharpness of this conflict by making the assumption that what was good for the growth of the system (or even for a single big corporation) was also good for the people. (Fromm 1976, p.6)

Paradoxically yet characteristic of his time and profession, Fromm roots all of this within the Christian myth. The story of the provision of manna in the wilderness is used as a model of anti-acquisitiveness (p.41/42). The manna is to be given to 'each according to their need' and is not to be hoarded until the next day, indeed hoarding is fruitless and the manna rots overnight. Likewise Fromm sees the institution of the Sabbath as a move against acquisitiveness. He describes it as "... rest in the sense of the re-establishment of complete harmony between human beings and between them and nature." (p.42) This is achieved by the proscription of acquisitive activity, and he reminds us that in Jewish tradition this is considered Messianic time (p.43), an ethos that he suggests the Christian Sunday has failed to capture.

Fromm also points to the debate in the Old Testament between God and the Israelites about having a king. God doesn't want to provide one but eventually caves in to their demands. This is an example of acquisitiveness according to Fromm and one that proved to be a very mixed blessing to the people of Israel.

If there was ample evidence of an anti-acquisitive orientation within the Old Testament, then Fromm finds even more in the New. He starts by citing the Sermon on the Mount as the apotheosis of Jesus' teaching:

"In these sayings we find as the central postulate that people must free themselves from all greed and cravings for possession and must take to liberate themselves from the structure of having, and conversely, that all positive ethical norms are rooted in an ethics of being, sharing, and solidarity." (Fromm 1976, p.45)

He quotes scripture directly:

Do not lay out for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth or rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matthew 16.9-21)

He contends that the anti-acquisitiveness of the New Testament not only encourages the renunciation of one's own rights, but also lays an obligation towards loving one's enemy (p.45). Fromm views Jesus' temptation in the wilderness as another example of the rejection of the acquisition of material wealth, power and status - Satan represents the urge to possession while Jesus represents the urge to 'being'.

If all of this seems rather straightforward and clear-cut, Fromm is too subtle a writer to leave things that simplistic. He goes on to draw on the work of Meister Eckhart to critique the having/acquisitive orientation in a more nuanced way. For Eckhart the will to total renunciation, to total poverty as seen in some of the ascetic saints, is as dangerous as wanting everything - wanting to 'have' nothing was as serious a compromise of liberty as wanting to 'have' everything. Fromm rejoices in Eckhart's practice of detachment or 'non-attachment'. For both Fromm and Eckhart it is the attachment that is the problem not the objects of attachment themselves which are morally neutral:

In the having mode of existence what matters is not the various *objects* of having, but our whole human attitude. Everything and

anything can become an object of craving: things we use in daily life, property, rituals, good deeds, knowledge, and thoughts. While they are not in themselves "bad," they become bad; that is, when we held on to them, when they become chains that interfere with our freedom, they block our self-realisation. (p.52)

Herein is a significant lesson for the contemporary Church. The great temptation in critiquing a Church enculturated within the New Capitalism with its obsession with numerical growth is to undermine the evangelistic task, to dismiss the very real call in scripture to interpret the Gospel to our society and to nurture those who God calls to discipleship within the Church. None of this is bad - numerically growing churches are not bad! However it could be argued that churches that concentrate on numerical growth almost to the exclusion of any other aspect of the Christian vocation, have lost the wider vision of salvation and mission to which the Church is called, and are not completely fulfilling their vocation.

There remains another issue to be resolved and that is a misapprehension that the having/ acquisitive mode is essentially active, while the being/ontological mode is essentially passive. However for Fromm, Eckhart provides the answer to this dilemma (p.53ff). Fromm reads Eckhart's understanding of being as embracing activity as opposed to busyness - "Being is about life, activity, birth, renewal, outpouring flowing out and productivity." (p.53) Indeed in a quintessentially Eckhartian paradox, Fromm writes:

Breaking through the mode of having is the condition for all genuine activity. In Eckhart's ethical system the supreme virtue is the state of productive inactivity, for which the premise is the overcoming of all forms of ego-boundness and craving. (p.54)

Having rooted the contrast between the having and being modes within the Christian narrative, Fromm goes on to do a detailed analysis of each approach. It is not necessary here to examine all his assertions in great



detail, but there are some points that shed light on the current position of the Church and show possible ways for the Church to negotiate itself out of this situation.

As we have seen, Fromm suggests that western society is primarily acquisitive, yet he says something interesting has developed in recent times. As society has become more and more affluent people's desires for material goods have to all intents and purposes been met. Fromm suggests that the new goal of acquisitiveness is not things, but rather people! (p.58) We live in a society where our relationships are more under scrutiny than ever before - we are required to be socially successful with lots of friends and rewarding relationships. Indeed social networks like Facebook encourage us to collect 'friends'; supermarkets and other businesses seek regular returning customers through loyalty card schemes; large employers, particularly in the United States don't offer their employees a job they offer then a whole lifestyle package, with the company/organisation as the hub. We live in a society that seeks to collect people consciously and unconsciously we have commodified other people.

Perhaps the Church needs to ask itself if in its evangelistic endeavours it has not done the same. Does the Alpha Course or any other outreach programme do much more than collect people and commodify them as new believers? Why is the Church so much happier with the Great Commandment than it is with Jesus' earlier command to his disciples not to tell anyone about him? To be fair, the evidence here is I think unclear. Undoubtedly there is much well motivated, compassionate and genuine Christian outreach that seeks nothing more than to connect a soul, perceived to be searching for God, with a tradition that seeks to give shape to that quest. But a Church enculturated both consciously and unconsciously in the mores of the New Capitalism cannot afford to be unclear about this. The commodification of people is about as far from the gospel as one can imagine and the Church as it engages in its evangelistic task needs to guard against it, not least because if the Church is operating unconsciously out of a

'I am what I have' mode then the primary purpose of its evangelistic task (which in this case should be more correctly called proselytising) becomes to bolster the Church's own poor self-image.

Fromm draws on both Aristotle and Aquinas in his exploration of the being /ontological mode (as does MacIntyre in his examination of virtue, as we shall see below). He defines this mode thus:

The mode of being has as its prerequisites independence, freedom, and the presence of critical reason. It's fundamental characteristic is that of being active, not in the sense of outward activity, of busyness, but of inner activity, the productive use of our human powers. To be active means to give expression to one's faculties, talents, to the wealth of human gifts with which – though in varying degrees - every human being is endowed. It means to renew oneself, to grow, to flow out, to love, to transcend the prison of one's isolated ego, to be interested... (Fromm, 1976 p.72)

There is a contrast, originally developed by Freud but rearticulated by Fromm, between behaviour and character. For Fromm, character is to be found in the being/ontological mode whereas behaviour can be an external mask, a role or persona. Thus the ontological orientation witnesses more clearly to the reality of who we are (p.79).

Last of all Fromm contrasts the having and being modes through his examination of a series of pairs of opposites from all of which the Church can learn something (p.88ff).

1. **Security - Insecurity:** We are already familiar with Fromm's suggestion that the having mode is based on the assumption that I am what I have. This breeds an insecurity of who I will be should I lose what I have. True security can only be found apart from acquisitiveness. Can the Church envision itself without a lot of what it thinks it possesses right now?

2. **Solidarity -Antagonism:** Do I need to be the sole owner of something to enjoy it? Can the Church share public space and public discourse; can it engage on equal terms with other discourses that claim to reveal truth?
3. **Joy-Pleasure:** Joy is a deep ontological knowledge while pleasure is a transient, generally external, sensation.
4. **Sin and Forgiveness:** Fromm puts it best - "Sin is not disobedience of irrational authority, but the violation of human well-being."(p.99)
5. **Fear of Dying - Affirmation of Living:** The fear of death is often related to the fear of losing what I 'have'.
6. **Here, Now-Past, Future:** The temptation to see the future as a possession - to 'have' a future.

This analysis of Fromm's exploration of the contrast between 'having' and 'being' modes, between acquisitiveness and ontology, enables us to understand some of the deeper currents that underlie foundationalism; the need to be able to demonstrate roots and to justify one's existence. Ultimately however this sells the Church short, as it captures it in a rationalised self-justifying cycle that prevents it from discovering the latent power of its ontological character.

## 2.3 Narcissism

We have seen how the acquisitive orientation is primarily self-justifying and self-seeking and this reveals another characteristic of the contemporary Church that has been identified by the clinical psychologist Paul Pruyser, that of a deeply engrained narcissism.<sup>32</sup> This should come as no surprise to us given the egocentric orientation that we have just traced.

Pruyser (1991a) identifies an near obsessive interest in the indestructibility of their souls in many believers (p.67) . He place this concern alongside a concern for personal salvation which he claims is frequently appropriated in

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<sup>32</sup> Both Fromm and Pruyser root psychological discourse as a key hermeneutical tool in the critique offered in this thesis, particularly in terms of social and societal analysis and not simply personal or interpersonal. See also Wulff, D (1997) p.346

blatantly narcissistic ways by many believers, leading to an inappropriate concern for their own spiritual wellbeing while disregarding the wellbeing of others.(p.68) This dynamic is magnified greatly if the believer has a particularly strong theology of Providence and/or Election. Indeed Pruyser defines the claim to be 'the greatest sinner of all' as being profoundly narcissistic. Yet he claims that though religious practice and theological conviction may be misappropriated and misused for narcissistic purposes, at heart historical religion is anti-narcissistic. For him the ultimate purpose of religious practice and discourse is to involve the individual believer and the community of faith in a process of change and transformation. (p.72)

Yet there are within the contemporary Church features and practices that militate against such change and transformation and which are used to bolster weak ego-structures - these features Pruyser calls 'regressive phenomena'. He is particularly critical of aspects of contemporary neo-charismatic practice, and invokes Rudolf Otto (he could just have easily invoked Erich Fromm) in contrasting 'bliss' and 'awe'. Contemporary charismatics, he says...

... may find themselves simulating bliss at the expense of awe leaving no room for that profound dynamic ambiguity between awe and bliss which is essential to man's encounter with holy because the nature of the holy spirit grandeur and benevolence. (Pruyser, 1991a p.77)

Here I suggest we have a classic Frommian acquisitive/ontological contrast - bliss is to be seen as the apprehension of a transitory emotion whereas awe implies a deeper more ontological orientation. Pruyser is deeply suspicious of the way the notion of the Holy Spirit can be misused, describing it as a "...theological construct which refers to an intermediary entity between God and man so hard to define that it begs for human projections to give it experiential content." (p.77) This leaves it open to abuse, not least in narcissistic ways. Pruyser sums up his concerns thus:

I think this danger is especially great in neo-charismatics who come from anti-Pentecostal traditions, because their search for an exciting and elevating religious experience has received much impetus from the dullness and stultification they allege to have undergone in their former church affiliations. They have something to contend, sometimes quite vehemently, and recourse to the Spirit permits acting out their negativism under the safety of a pious cloak. With clinical discernment it is not difficult to see grandiosity in the cheer of some Spirit-filled people. (Pruyser 1991a, p.78)

Pruyser is also critical of the culture of leadership that has grown up in the church, seeing it as another expression of grandiosity. Once again he uses terminology close to that of Fromm to describe a narcissistic urge to power by association by some and automaton conformity by others. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the direction of this thought, Pruyser also questions whether or not the urge to evangelise has narcissistic elements, is it also about an urge to power; is it about the need to bolster a weak ego by seeking affirmation of belief from others; is there a sense of messianic election derived from the rejection of evangelistic advances? (p.79)

Through the psychological approach of both Pruyser and Fromm we have been able to examine some of the deeper currents that lie below the foundationalism that permeates both society and the Church, and how it is based on a fear of freedom. We have seen the consequences of that foundationalism in creating an acquisitive and narcissistic orientation within individuals and society, and how these orientations also permeate the life of the Church. Our next task then must be to begin to map out an appropriate response to this diagnosis.

## **2.4 Christ & Culture**

The first issue we need to address in positing a remedy for this situation is the relationship between the Church and the society and culture in which it is placed. Richard Niebuhr's ground-breaking book *Christ and Culture* (1951), though somewhat dated and increasingly critiqued, offers a

sufficient starting point. It is not necessary to analyse Niebuhr's argument in great detail here, but simply to sketch out its broad trajectory.

Niebuhr suggests that the inability to define Christ adequately must be countenanced by at least an inadequate definition. For this he offers love, hope and obedience alongside faith and humility. He notes significantly that belief in Jesus Christ necessitates a two-way movement, firstly away from the world and towards God, and secondly, back from God to the world in 'teaching and practicing the commandments'. (p.11)

Culture is no simpler to define. Niebuhr offers a variety of definitions of culture that he sees as operating within society. There is not much that Niebuhr sees as unifying these approaches other than a broad agreement that culture is ultimately to do with values, but there remains a wide diversity of understanding as to the nature and origins of such values. He concludes that it is essential to view culture as pluralistic. To these generalised definitions, Niebuhr offers five possible models of interaction (p.45ff).

**1. Christ against the Culture:** This position sees Christ as the sole authority for the Christian, and culture as having no claim. Indeed culture is seen as the dwelling place of evil and no compromise must be made with it and this includes any adoption or absorption of Greco-Roman philosophy. This approach Niebuhr suggests is the qualified approach of the New Testament and the Early Church, which is especially evident in the work of Tertullian. The world, and therefore culture, is viewed as transitory, while Christ is eternal. Niebuhr quotes Harnack in saying God's people are called to be a 'new people, a new humanity' outside the strictures of culture and mainstream. This approach is credited with spawning mainstream monasticism. Niebuhr sees this position as necessary but inadequate, being open to abuse and to a misreading of some of the sources.

**2. Christ of Culture:** This position takes an opposing view - Christ is seen as the fulfilment of the hopes and aspirations of society. Indeed Jesus is to be found in and through culture and is seen as saviour of the world and not simply of a small band of followers. The Gnostics developed this view further claiming that Jesus was a spiritual saviour and engagement with society and culture was irrelevant. For Niebuhr the most problematic bit of this approach is the role of the cross, which he says remains offensive to mainstream society. He also suggests that it is ethically light as well. This model is attractive to many but would seem to compromise the distinctiveness of the Gospel and thus is also distrusted by many as it is seen as reductive.

**3. Christ above Culture:** The dualism of the previous positions is overturned, moving from an either/or position to a both/and (p.127). Niebuhr describes this approach as seeing the issue as not between Christ and Culture, but fundamentally between God and man (p.124), indeed this model to some extent reflects the dual nature of Christ himself - fully human, yet fully divine. In short this seeks a synthesis of Christ and Culture which can be traced back to the work of Justin Martyr (p.130) and Aquinas (p.135). The Christ above Culture approach facilitates a real engagement between faith and society including other religious traditions, while retaining the distinctiveness of the Christian tradition (p.147).

**4. Christ and Culture in Paradox:** This is perhaps the most dualistic of all Niebuhr's models. The paradoxes of opposites are brought to the fore - law and Grace; divine wrath and mercy. There is no attempt to resolve these tensions; rather the believer is seen to live 'between the lines' of the demands of faith and culture.

**5. Christ the Transformer of Culture:** The possibility of the life of faith impacting and transforming the world of culture is what drives this approach. In many ways it is the most optimistic of all five approaches. Niebuhr bases this on three theological principles: a) The creative activity of

God and of Christ-in-God is as important as any theology of atonement; b) the Fall is an action of man not God - creation is essentially good and 3) History can be seen as an interaction between God and man. Niebuhr cites the conversionist approach predominately in the Fourth Gospel, in Augustine and latterly in the work of F D Maurice.

Niebuhr doesn't privilege any one of these particular readings of the relationship between Christ and Culture, indeed he describes the relationship as '...unconcluded and inconclusive.' (p.230) In individual Christians and for the institution of the Church it is fair to say that at different times and in different contexts we can see each of these positions being acted out.

This very brief survey of Niebuhr's five approaches to the relationship between Christ and Culture simply opens up the possibility of different approaches that contrast with the predominant enculturation that we have traced. What we need to explore now is how the Church is able to move from the captivity of its current enculturation to a freer ability to interact with its surrounding culture in ways of its own choosing. This leads to one of the central claims of this thesis - that the Church needs to retrieve its own ontological character (or in psychological language, the Church needs to individuate) if it is to perform its task within society and work for the building of the Kingdom of God.

David Martin suggests that this might be one of the gifts of secularisation. Drawing on the work of Talcott Parsons, he suggests that secularisation is causing religion to individuate whether or not it wants to. Martin affirms Parson's claim is that as religion recedes or is pushed from its dominant position in society so it is forced to review and revise its identity and purpose. This 'social differentiation', as Martin calls it, is exactly the process this thesis seeks to analyse and is the sociological equivalent of psychological individuation (Martin 2005).



In order to discover how it might do this we will first examine the nature, role and function of character in ancient and contemporary thought, and the broader field of Virtue Ethics in which the development of character is generally situated.

## **2.5 Virtue Ethics**

Virtue Ethics offer a useful way in to the discovery of a right relationship between Church and society as it sidesteps the foundationalism of both deontological and utilitarian/consequentialist ethics. The 'right response' to any situation is to be determined by the inner virtue or wisdom of the person involved. This inner virtue/wisdom is formed over time through a habituation of right action – by doing the right thing we learn to do the right thing until it become instinctive. Thus the emphasis on external reference points is greatly lessened - the agent being free to act in what seems to be the most appropriate way to them in their particular context.

### **2.5.1 Virtue Ethics in the Scripture and the Tradition**

Virtue Ethics is generally understood to have had its origins in the ethical thought of Aristotle, and it is in the work of Aristotle that the foremost contemporary advocate of Virtue Ethics, Alasdair MacIntyre, roots his argument, an argument we will examine in some detail below.

However the incorporation and adaption of Aristotelian ethics into Christian thought was not completely straightforward. MacIntyre notes that Aristotle would "not have admired Jesus Christ and he would have been horrified by St. Paul" (MacIntyre 1981, p.184). Yet despite this we are able to recognise significant common ground in the Early Church and its scholastic successors. For the New Testament writers...

A virtue is, as with Aristotle, a quality the exercise of which leads to the achievement of the human *telos*. The good for man is of course a supernatural and not only a natural good, but supernature redeems and completes nature. Moreover the relationship of virtues as means to the end which is human incorporation in the divine kingdom of the

age to come is internal and not external, just as it is in Aristotle. It is of course this parallelism which allows Aquinas to synthesise Aristotle and the New Testament. (MacIntyre 1981 p.184)

N T Wright (Wright, 2010) and Wayne Meeks (Meeks, 1993), amongst others, trace how the Early Church soon began to understand its own teleology as the fulfilment of the Kingdom; and the means to achieve this, and thus the counterpart of Aristotle's concept of Eudemonia, was through individual and corporate salvation. Salvation was through Grace and the Grace was received by the actions of the Spirit in forming the mind of Christ within the disciple (Galatians 4.19). Indeed while it is not wrong to claim that what we might call virtue ethics are dealt with in the New Testament implicitly rather than explicitly, the preferential option towards Grace away from the Law can be read as an argument against deontology, and the requirement of the Spirit's guidance as a rebuttal of emotivism (which the New Testament would describe as sin).

The first Christian theologian to seriously engage with virtue ethics and the one who has made the most significant impact is Thomas Aquinas. Thomist ethics can be seen as a Christianised Aristotialianism. Aquinas much admired Aristotle's schema but felt it needed updating in the light of Christian revelation not least, the Incarnation. He contrasts the 'natural' virtues (Aristotle's cardinal virtues) Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance, with those that are 'supernaturally infused' i.e. which are gifts of the Spirit. These later virtues are sometimes called the theological virtues and are rooted in the New Testament, being Faith, Hope and Charity, so forming the seven classical virtues, four natural, three infused. Thomas in his *Secunda secundae* undertakes a detailed analysis of each virtue, breaking it down into three constituent aspects – its integral, subjective, and potential parts. (Pope, 2011)

Such detail need not concern us here, suffice it to say that the teleology of Thomist ethics is Natural Law, the human desire to fulfil their God-given

potential, and as we will see this corresponds to the Aristotelian concept of *Phronesis* or 'practical wisdom'. Bourke notes that this emphasis on moral habituation leading to self-perfection was open to critique not least in terms of the Pelagian heresy, however he suggests that an altruistic balance is achieved by Thomas through his emphasis on justice and charity (Bourke 1986).

Whereas Thomist ethical thought may be seen as the highpoint of Christian virtue ethics, the Reformation and subsequent Enlightenment marked the beginning of its decline. For the Reformers the notion of virtue ethics seemed too close to a doctrine of salvation through works and conflicted with their renewed emphasis on salvation through Grace. This is a significant critique - Christian virtue ethics not properly contextualised within a broader theological discourse can easily tip into a form of Pelagianism whereby the believer can to some extent seem to achieve salvation through their own efforts. Such a reading of virtue ethics would be incorrect, but there is something about the very elusive nature of virtue ethics that leaves it open to misinterpretation.

Common to both the Reformation and the Enlightenment was a move away from an understanding of life as something held in common amongst communities and society towards a far greater emphasis on the individual. This too undermined the Aristotelian roots of virtue ethics that were unrepentantly social and communal, being rooted in a commonly assented to teleology held across the entire polis, or city-state.

Perhaps the final blow to virtue ethics came with the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Once again the elusive nature of what exactly virtue was, and a lack of clarity of how it could be measured, led to its dismissal from moral discourse in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in favour of more rationalist approaches, be they deontological or utilitarianism. Cartesian foundationalism moved into the ascendant and became the dominant philosophical model of

modernism, essentially eclipsing virtue ethics for a period of about three hundred years.

Virtue Ethics were to undergo a revival in the late twentieth century, not least through the work of Alastair MacIntyre whose spirit permeates this thesis. MacIntyre's work, supremely *After Virtue* (1981), has been deeply influential and has influenced a generation of ethicists, with perhaps the most prominent current proponent of a virtue ethic approach being the American political philosopher Michael Sandel. Sandel's famous lecture course at Harvard entitled simply *Justice* and which was published in 2009 in a book of the same name (Sandel, 2009) seeks to rehabilitate the notion of civic virtue in a very Aristotelian mode:

If a just society involves reasoning together about the good life, it remains to ask what kind of political discourse would point us in this direction... For many people, talk of virtue in politics brings to mind religious conservatives telling people how to live. But this is not the only way that conceptions of virtue and the common good can inform politics. The challenge is to imagine a politics that takes moral and spiritual questions seriously, but brings them to bear on broad economic and civil concerns, not only sex and abortion. (p. 261-2)

Sandel's work came to prominence in the UK through his 2009 Reith Lectures. Since then he has been a regular commentator on political and financial ethics, not least in shaping a response to the recent series of banking scandals.

Theologically MacIntyre's work has also been influential, spanning a broad range of ecclesial traditions. Perhaps its clearest influence has been on the Radical Orthodoxy movement spearheaded by John Milbank.<sup>43</sup> Milbank has

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<sup>43</sup> It could be argued that the work of Milbank and other 'radically Orthodox' writer should have a greater prominence in this thesis. They don't because I don't believe that Radical Orthodoxy presents an ecclesiological vision per se. It offers a renewed epistemological and theological framework, but only derivetly an ecclesiology. This is best articulated in

suggested that Radical Orthodoxy seeks to be more MacIntyrean than MacIntyre - it 'appropriates and radicalises' MacIntyre's thesis (Smith 2004 p.242). Milbank finds fault with MacIntyre's attempt to challenge nihilism, suggesting that as nihilism is a *mythos* it cannot be challenged or engaged with, but simply out-narrated (p.181). He also questions MacIntyre's embrace of a broad Aristotelian conception of virtue, suggesting that only a full-on Christian virtue will do. That said the influence of MacIntyre on Milbank and other Radical Orthodoxy authors remains clear to see. Likewise the American Methodist/Episcopalian theologian Stanley Hauerwas covers similar territory though his initial text on the subject of character '*Character and the Christian Life*' that was published in 1975 thereby preceding MacIntyre's opus, though *After Virtue* has influenced his subsequent work. Hauerwas has engaged with the Reformed tradition much more than Milbank, re-alerting that tradition to the riches of Thomist thought.

Philip Blond, a former student of Milbank and now like Michael Sandel a political philosopher, is perhaps the most contemporary of current proponents of virtue ethics in the United Kingdom. Blond heads an influential think-tank *Res Publica*. Blond's manifesto *Red Tory (2010)* calls for nothing less than the reappropriation of a virtuous society and is said to have deeply influenced the 2010 Conservative Party manifesto and its leader David Cameron's call for a 'Big Society', calls which have faded in the light of the search for more immediate and foundationalist solutions to the economic downturn of the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Paradoxically as the talk of a Big Society (a virtue-based voluntary sector) dwindles, so the call for a renewed morality within public life based on personal virtue can be detected in the light of recent political, financial and media scandals.

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Davidson, A. & Milbank, A. (2010). *For the Parish - a critique of Fresh Expressions*, London: SCM, which is explored more fully below.

We too, in our search of a virtuous Church, must draw from the same well, that of MacIntyre's retrieval of Aristotelialism, though some of our conclusions may be somewhat different.

### 2.5.2 MacIntyre & Aristotle

MacIntyre's primary claim in *After Virtue* was that the western moral tradition was in disarray, and no longer had a normative cohesive narrative. All that remained were a few fragments from an eroded tradition now basically forgotten. The key cause of this erosion according to MacIntyre was the failure of the Enlightenment Project, of foundationalism. The empirical, rationalist and acquisitive philosophy initiated by Descartes had failed and spawned a nihilistic emotivism whereby anything goes. For MacIntyre there were two great losses in modernism, firstly any sense of a commonly held teleology of human existence and secondly a unifying tradition that provided a context and reference points for moral discourse. The Emotivism that supplanted these is based on the precept that if an action feels right to an individual then they have a complete moral right to do it – MacIntyre describes it thus:

Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgements and more specifically all moral judgements are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character. (MacIntyre 1981 p. 12)

Thus the moral authority of any particular act is simply the authority that the agent gives it - the action itself is not accountable to any wider moral code. While this might on face value seem to be relatively similar to virtue ethics with the centrality of individual responsibility, in reality it couldn't be further removed. The fundamental difference between emotivism and virtue ethics is training and habituation. Emotivism sees no need for training or formation of character and is simply based on need to act on a current feeling or whim, whereas virtue ethics is predicated on the formation of a virtuous character. For MacIntyre the demise of the Cartesian

foundationalism of both deontology and utilitarianism and the predominance of emotivism as the primary mode of moral discourse faces society with a choice - to embrace emotivism and thereby a Nietzschean nihilism or to retrieve a ditched Aristotelianism in the search for a virtuous society, and thereby reengage with a long tradition of classical and indeed Christian thought (p.109ff).

For classical society, virtue was synonymous with excellence - the virtuous life was one that sought excellence in all things. Indeed the 'good life' was very much the ultimate goal of life and society (the 'polis'). The importance of such teleology cannot be underestimated in a contemporary retrieval of virtue ethics. Kallenberg (2011) points to Aristotle's clear belief that teleology is intrinsic to humanity, it is part of what it means to be human and to reject it is to reject something fundamental to human functioning. MacIntyre draws on Aristotle to contextualise this within a divine context, albeit one the Christian theology would struggle to recognise:

The impersonal unchanging divinity of which Aristotle speaks, the metaphysical contemplation of which furnishes man with his specific and ultimate *telos*, can itself take no interest in the merely human, let alone the dilemmatic; it is nothing other than thought timelessly thinking itself and conscious of nothing but itself. (MacIntyre 1981 p. 158)

Here though we see a clear contrast with the prevalent emotivism so disdained by MacIntyre. Emotivism has no teleological goal, save arguably the satisfaction of individual desire. Virtue ethics both in its classical and contemporary forms has a clear teleology of the good life, which can be considered normative. Aristotle names the four virtues he saw as being the 'hinges' ('cardinal' virtues) on which the virtuous life depended: justice, prudence, temperance and fortitude. As we have seen this schema, when contextualised by the theological virtues, forms the basis of Thomist ethical thinking.

For Aristotle that '**good life**' was summed up in the word 'Eudemonia', which is generally translated as wellbeing both for individuals and for society. MacIntyre describes it as "...the state of being well and doing well in being well, of man's being well-favoured himself and in relation to the divine" (p.148).

The key virtue in achieving 'eudemonia' is 'phronesis' or **practical wisdom** and relates to the education of conscience and intuition. It is to be clearly distinguished from theoretical wisdom as it enables the agent to respond appropriately and practically in any given situation and provides the ability to discern the central plank of Aristotelian ethics, the Golden Mean.

Perhaps the most important use of practical reason is its employment in the balancing of human activities. I cannot spend all my time in theoretical contemplation, the highest faculty of reason and thus the highest human good, because I would soon starve to death. In order to maximise the amount of time I can engage in contemplation, I must balance this activity with work, civic duty and the like. (Kallenberg, 2011)

So for Aristotle and for virtue ethics more generally, the education and formation of conscience and intuition in practical wisdom ('phronesis') is of paramount importance. Simply acting from a set of given rules (deontology) is not enough, the agent must not only do the right thing, but must do it for the right reasons - both act and motivation must be right. So virtue is more than that right action, it is a reorientation of motivation, indeed of the whole being, as MacIntyre points out:

Virtues are dispositions not only to act in particular ways, but also to feel in particular ways. To act virtuously is not, as Kant was later to think, to act against inclination; it is to act from inclination formed by



the cultivation of virtues. Moral education is 'éducation sentimentale'.

The educated moral agent must of course know what he is doing when he judges or acts virtuously. Thus he does what is virtuous *because* it is virtuous. (MacIntyre 1981, p.149)

Indeed MacIntyre is keen to emphasise the **unity of life** - one cannot be virtuous in one area of life and not in another - thus the notion of a 'good administrator' is indicative of professional competence rather than virtue itself (p.205). True virtue transcends function.

Virtue ethics then liberates the agent from the formulaic constrictions of deontology and gives the contextual flexibility of utilitarianism. But this is done within a normative teleology and so generates the spiral of virtuous habituation whereby the agent becomes good by doing good things.

Kallenberg points out MacIntyre's conviction that for Aristotle moral thinking was a skill rather than an intellectual exercise (as later philosophers were to contend) and "...such skill could be attained and cultivated only from within the form of life in which these concepts were at home." (Kallenberg, 2011 p.33)

Immersion within a particular form of life presupposes a **community** wherein that form of life is lived. Bondi suggests that community serves at least two roles in the formation of virtuous character; firstly,

...it provides a historical and cultural setting for the appropriation of stories and their moral vocabulary...'and secondly '... it charges certain members with the proclamation, teaching and evocation of normative stories and with responsibilities in assisting its members with their attempt at character formation. (Bondi 1986, p.83)

For Aristotle this community was the 'polis', but as MacIntyre points out the classical notion of the polis is far removed from that of contemporary liberal democratic society - so does this mean that virtue is impossible in our current situation (p. 163) or does it simply point up the need for the formation of what might be conceived as counter-cultural moral communities in which such formation can take place?

The breakdown of community in modernity, accelerated by consumerism, that we have tracked, and that MacIntyre bemoans, leads the individual to question - 'of what stories am I a part?' This opens up another significant area of MacIntyre's project, the role of **narrative** in the formation of people and society. According to MacIntyre:

The narrative therefore in which human life is embodied has a form in which the subject....is set a task in the completion of which lies their peculiar appropriation of the human good... (p.175)

MacIntyre's explanation of how narrative contextualises and gives meaning to our actions is glorious as it captures the dynamic he is trying to illustrate perfectly:

I am standing waiting for a bus and the young man standing next to me suddenly says: 'The name of the common wild duck is *Histrionicus, histrionicus, histrionicus.*' There is no problem as to the meaning of the sentence he uttered: the problem is, how to answer the question, what was he doing in uttering it? Suppose he just uttered such sentences at random intervals; this would be one possible form of madness. We would render his action of utterance intelligible if one of the following turned out to be true. He had mistaken me for someone who yesterday had approached him in the library and asked: 'Do you by any chance know the Latin name of the common wild duck?' *Or* he has just come from a session with his psychotherapist who has urged him to break down his shyness by

talking to strangers. 'But what shall I say?' 'Oh, anything at all.' *Or* he is a Soviet spy waiting at a prearranged rendez-vous and uttering the ill-chosen code sentence which will identify him to his contact. In each case the act of utterance become intelligible by finding a place in a narrative. (p.210)

Thus we can see how narrative both contextualises particular actions but also how a community formed by a particular narrative might offer a teleology to its members.

In the light of Aristotle's emphasis on *phronesis* it is clear that this formation in virtue is not purely intellectual, nor indeed primarily so. Aristotle's goal is the complete reorientation of the person in virtue and this is achieved through the habituation of virtuous practice. Formation through practice is fundamental to MacIntyre's project, as it is to this thesis.

MacIntyre oft quoted definition of **a practice** is complex and multi-layered. He defines a practice as...

...any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (p.187)

We will examine this in considerable detail in a later chapter; suffice it for the moment to note key elements of MacIntyre's formulation. Firstly, a practice in this context is a '...socially established cooperative human activity'. This resonates well with Aristotle's emphasis on both habituation and communal setting for the cultivation of virtue. Significant is the implication that virtue cannot be cultivated in isolation - MacIntyre points

out that throwing a football with skill is not a practice, while playing a game of football is. Such an approach challenges the individualism of modernity. Ecclesialogically, as we shall see, it points up the need for at least some form of commonality and mutuality in ecclesial life.

Socially established practices contextualised by narrative generally assume the name of **tradition**. MacIntyre argues forcefully for the reappropriation of tradition defining it as '...an historically extended, socially embodied argument, an argument precisely in part about the goods that constitute the tradition.' (p.222) So the narrative and the practices whereby it is acted out is always dynamic, always fluid and evolving.

MacIntyre's emphasis on '**internal goods**' is striking, and mounts a clear challenge to the acquisitive consumerism that we have already identified as being so rampant in contemporary society and the Church. MacIntyre offers a renewed focus on interiority through the education and formation of conscience and intuition. Perhaps it is worth recognising the magnitude of such a claim. While it might be argued that the Church at least pays lip service to interiority (generally through a nostalgic glance at the past), few of its current programmes of training or formation explicitly engage in matters of formation of conscience and/or intuition. If the evidence is thin in the church it is more or less absent in secular society. This perhaps most clearly vindicates MacIntyre's initial diagnosis of the disintegration of the western moral tradition.

The third point in MacIntyre's definition worth drawing attention to at this point is **the systematic extension of the 'ends and goods involved'**. Virtuous practice always seeks excellence and always strives for new insights, new applications. It is neither static or rigid, but rather dynamic and responsive. The virtuous person then seeks to develop, to improve, to deepen and if the practices in which they are engaged do not ultimately lead to such deepening and developing, then they need to be scrutinised with some care. The key implication of this for the life of the Church is that

virtuous practice, far from being 'old hat' and outdated is profoundly missional, indeed it might be argued a much more effective and long-lasting form of mission than those initiatives that simply focus on what MacIntyre would describe as 'external goods'.

Up to this point we have taken a brief overview of the component parts of a retrieved virtue ethic as formulated by MacIntyre drawing heavily on Aristotelian tradition. What remains is MacIntyre's summative description of **virtue** itself.

A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving such goods. (p.191)

Once again note worthy is the emphasis on the achievement of internal goods and the role of cultivated virtue in facilitating this. Indeed, if MacIntyre's formulation is to be believed the achievement of internal goods is impossible without the foundation of virtue. Thus the cultivation of virtuous character is essential and we must undertake a similarly brief overview of the nature and implications of having a virtuous or well-formed character before examining some aspects in more detail.

## **2.6 Character**

Tom Wright in his book *Virtue Reborn* (2010) illustrates the concept of a virtuous or well-formed character by recounting the story of Chelsey Sullenberger III, the captain of an US Airways Airbus A320, who in January 2009 after both engines had been disabled by a bird-strike safely landed the plane in the Hudson river and supervised the safe evacuation of all the passengers and crew. Wright's point echoing that which we have already seen in MacIntyre, is that it was because Sullenberger was a skilled pilot with an educated intuition and conscience that he was able to implement the actions needed to ensure a safe outcome immediately and spontaneously.

Reference to some external book of rules is not needed, nor was he tempted simply to panic and grasp around for possible courses of actions, which would almost definitely have ended in disaster. What happened was that because of his training, because he had practiced this scenario again and again, he was able to immediately implement the actions needed (p.7-9). This is what virtuous character is all about - it is about an educated intuition, an educated conscience, an educated unconscious.

Wright makes some potent observations on this event - Sullenberger wasn't born with the ability to fly, it was something that he had nurtured and practised over a lifetime. So it is with virtue, while we may be born with the latent potential of good we are not born with fully formed virtuous characters - we have to practise and develop those intrinsic gifts. (Wright 2010) However as Hauerwas argues, the prize for so doing is true freedom - a freedom which gives us the courage and the ability to respond truthfully to any given situation (Hauerwas, 1983).

This reveals a significant aspect of character - that it promotes effective action or agency. Indeed Hauerwas defines character as the "...qualification or determination of our self-agency, formed by our having certain intentions (and beliefs) rather than others." (Hauerwas 1975, p.115) Elsewhere he says '...agency but names our ability to inhabit our character.' (Hauerwas 1983, p.40)

All this said, Hauerwas reminds us that good actions do not necessarily mean a good character - as we have seen, character transcends function. (p. 39) He goes on to quote Aristotle's contrasting of art and virtue - for Aristotle artistic success depends purely on the object or product produced, whereas for virtue the product (action) is not definitive, but can only be considered virtuous if the agent a) knows what he is doing, b) chooses to act in that particular way and c) does so for the sake of the act itself (Aristotle *Ethics* 115a27-32 in Hauerwas 1975). Thomas Aquinas puts it this way:

...for an act to be absolutely good "it is not enough for it to be good in one point only; it must be good in every respect. If therefore the will be good both from its proper object and from its end, it follows that the external action is good. But if the will be good from its intention of the end, this is not enough to make the external action good; and if the will be evil either by reason of its intention of the end, or by reason of the act willed, it follows that the external action is evil. (Aquinas ST, I-II, 20.2 in Hauerwas 1975, p.67)

Implicit in this for Hauerwas is that ability of the agent to offer a reason for his action as the virtuous action must be underpinned by rational thought (p.42), and from this follows the notion that every virtuous act that is a product of a virtuous character is by nature voluntary. The virtuous character can choose whether or not to take a course of action. He/she is not compelled to act in a particular way, as the impetus for any particular action is internal, based on the education of reason, conscience and intuition.

This ability to choose is one of the key implications of the development of character and why it is ultimately more liberating than either rule-bound deontological ethics or the formulaic best outcome for the most people of utilitarianism/consequentialism. Hauerwas seeks to determine how this choice is made and he once again probes Aristotle, revealing a more nuanced and variegated approach than we have seen thus far. Hauerwas quotes Aristotle's contention that choice is motivated by both desire and reason (p.46). This is really significant as in contemporary psychodynamic terms it recognises the influence of subconscious desire alongside rational and conscious reason. Again Hauerwas quotes Aristotle in saying that neither one nor the other, neither desire nor reason, must be allowed to dominate the choice making process - it must be an integrated movement of conscious and unconscious, of reason and intuition - 'Choice is "a deliberate desire for things that are within our power" (Aristotle *Ethics* 115a27-32 in (Hauerwas, 1975). This leads Aristotle and Hauerwas to suggest that the ability to choose is both a mark of, and formative of, character. (p.49).

Such an understanding of the nature of choice and its contribution to character is apparent in Thomist ethics as well. Indeed Bondi suggests that late twentieth century Anglo-American philosophy also focuses on exploring 'matters of intentionality; the interaction of thought, action, disposition and desire...' (Bondi, 1986)

The centrality of practical wisdom in agency is also noted by Hauerwas, who suggests that it acts as a form of moral intuition, alerting the agent to the ethical and moral implications of their actions (p.60). He gives the example of a doctor needing more than theoretical knowledge to cure his patients - external reference points are not enough, the doctor must have the wisdom and judgement to know when, where and how to apply his theoretical knowledge. Thus we can perhaps claim that all theoretical knowledge must be rooted in agency if it is to be considered virtuous.

This chapter has sought to explore some of the underlying theoretical issues beneath the corrosion of character in society and in the church that we identified in the previous chapter. Fromm and Pruyser offer a psychodynamic insight on acquisitiveness and narcissism, and Niebuhr opens up different possibilities for the relationship between Church and Culture. In the second half of this chapter I have sought to map briefly some of the theoretical concepts that underlie the remedies that I will propose; having done so we can now explore some of those concepts and their implications in more detail.



## **Chapter 3: Towards a Theology of Ecclesial Character – sacraments, sanctification and the Church**

### **3.1 The Roots of Ecclesial Character**

The study of Virtue Ethics points clearly to conditions necessary for the formation of virtuous character. Both MacIntyre and Hauerwas identify the centrality of Narrative and Community as defining factors in the formation of character, both personal and corporate.

#### **3.1.1 Narrative**

MacIntyre sums up the importance of narrative when he says:

...man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a storytelling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'what am I to do?', if I can answer the prior question 'of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' (MacIntyre 1981, p.43)

He goes on to assert that all human speech and action is simply enacted narrative. (MacIntyre, 1981).

The role of narrative in determining our own self-identity is also well documented by Michele Crossley who examines the place of narrative within psychotherapeutic processes (Crossley, 2000).<sup>46</sup> She identifies the formative role of fairy tales and children's mythology in enabling children to understand the society into which they are growing and in giving them a script through which to understand the moral dilemmas they will face. She goes on to suggest that soap-operas, TV drama and films have exactly the

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<sup>46</sup> Crossley is another example of psychological discourse offering a hermeneutical tool to explore this territory. She offers another perspective on narrative and the construction of meaning and strengthens the web on which my argument is based.

same function for adults, in enabling them at one remove to examine 'eternal moral conflicts' (p.48).

Crossley suggests that our own self-identity is primarily constructed through narrative. We tell the story of our lives and what we include and what we leave out and how we interpret the events of our lives gives us a character that we at least partially construct ourselves. She states that where people suffer psychological or mental illness, often there is a need to review the narrative of that person's life. Through the process of interaction with a therapist a narrative that seems fragmentary or contradictory can be re-authored or co-authored to acquire a greater unity and source of motivation for the individual. Thus narrative can be understood as that which makes separate events and experiences coherent – it shapes our understanding. Such an approach has significant implications for our understanding of Spiritual Direction and will be further examined later in this thesis.

While being in no way a virtue ethicist, this approach also contains much that resonates with the philosophical project of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's central claim is that reality is constructed linguistically. There is a reciprocity in Wittgenstein's approach as Davidson & Milbank point out:

Language allows us to understand ourselves, and our practices, it also works the other way round. Language gets intelligibility from the shared practices in which it is embodied. (Davidson & Milbank 2010, p.12)

This relationship between language and 'practices' alerts us to significant implications for the formation of identity and character, which we shall explore further below. However there is also a relationship between narrative and community – narratives, or at least a collection of narratives,

constitute a tradition and those drawn to the tradition are formed by it into a community.

### **3.1.2 Community**

The necessity of community for the formation of virtuous character draws on another assertion of MacIntyre as noted by Fowers:

...certain goods, perhaps the most precious goods, can only be held in common (MacIntyre, 1999)... consider a few examples such as democracy, friendship, solidarity and justice. No one can possess democracy or experience solidarity on their own. (Fowers 2005, p.85)

This assertion makes the bigger point that character is, by definition, social and relational, and thus that the loss of character can be ascribed to the breakdown of social and relational bonds within society. Fowers suggests a level of self-interest within this dynamic – because we are unable to generate internally and individually all that we need, we are reliant on others, and our way of ensuring a continuing supply of that which we need is to offer others that which they need. This leads to a relationship of interdependency - however within society it is often the case that those whom we are called to help are different to those from whom we receive our support (Fowers, 2005).

However simple membership of a community does not guarantee the development of the ‘internal goods’ of that community – active participation is needed and while community can offer the individual both context and potential to so develop, it is only through active engagement with the ‘practices’ of that community that its goods, both internal and external will be developed (Fowers, 2005)

### **3.1.3 Sacramentally Constructed**

In terms of the development of Christian character both individual and corporate/ecclesial, these themes of narrative and community can be found

most clearly in the sacramental actions of Baptism and the Eucharist. This leads to another key contention of this thesis, that ecclesial character is both sacramentally constructed and sacramental by nature. But before we can examine this argument in detail we need to explore the engagement of theological discourse with narrative more generally.

### **3.1.4 Narrative Theology**

Recent years have seen a burgeoning of interest in the theological possibilities of narrative. This has been fuelled by a perceived failure in a rational, propositional approach and has been spearheaded by post-liberal theologians such as George Lindbeck, Hans Frei, John Milbank and Stanley Hauerwas. I suggest that Narrative Theology is deeply sacramental in its approach to text and scripture. The presenting text is seen as 'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual truth'<sup>48</sup> and as such needs to be performed, generally through liturgy or ritual, for that inner truth to be accessed and understood. The text then is seen as a repository for the community's memory, conscious and unconscious, and this is 're-membered' through liturgy and ritual, where the events remembered become present in the here and now.<sup>49</sup>

Loughlin (1999) in his significant study echoes the suggestion that this renewed interest in narrative is as a response from postmodernism to the failures of scientific modernism. The grand meta-narratives seem all to have been deconstructed, and individuals and organisations are forced to create their own stories, often out of the rubble of these former meta-narratives. This, he claims, is done in a very random, pick-and-mix way.

According to Loughlin, narrative theology fills the gap after the widespread discrediting of foundationalism within theological circles. Narrative theology rejects the foundationalism both of Biblical literalism and of the supremacy of experience (Murphy, 2007), however for some it remains controversial due to its perceived lack of clear rootedness. Narrative

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<sup>48</sup> See Book of Common Prayer

<sup>49</sup> See Guiver 1996

Theology also rejects certain hermeneutical practices such as historical and literary criticism – gone is the need to discover scripture within its own historical context, or indeed cultural references – what matters is the trajectory into the future that is discerned through contemporary performance:

First comes the objectivities of the religion, its language, doctrines, liturgies, and modes of action, and it is through these that passions are shaped into various kinds of what is called religious experience. (Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine* in Loughlin 1999 p.39)

If Narrative Theology has a foundation it is the performance of the ‘story’ of scripture. It is this ‘story’ that shapes religious consciousness and forms character. Loughlin quotes Auerbach in describing scripture as a ‘consuming text’ - just as the God of Moses is adamant that the people of Israel can have no other God than he, so the text of scripture extends an all consuming demand on its reader(p.37). This claim is simply the claim that the story of God as revealed in Jesus is the normative story, or as David Tracy says, the ‘classic’(2000). Thus this story becomes normative for the development of Christian character.

Sam Wells<sup>50</sup> develops the implications of this narrative approach for both Christian living and ethics (Wells, 2010b). He identifies three approaches to ethics and their corresponding underlying ethical assumptions. The ‘universal’ approach seeks widespread common ground in ethical discourse; the ‘subversive’ approach views ethics primarily around issues of power and seeks to reveal the power dynamics behind attitudes and decisions - such an approach is deeply influenced by Marxist analysis and within the Church, liberation theologies; and finally the ‘ecclesial’ approach seeks a confident,

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<sup>50</sup> Sam Wells and Stanley Hauerwas make important contributions to my argument, Hauerwas particularly. Hauerwas is the link between MacIntyre’s virtue ethics and overt theological dialogue. Hauerwas’s work on the development of character was concurrent with MacIntyre’s and thus doesn’t reference MacIntyre’s but they both draw deeply from the wells of Aristotelianism and Thomism. Sam Wells was until recently a colleague of Hauerwas who’s work reflects similar concerns.

theological engagement with a wide variety of issues, and particularly how the distinctiveness of the Christian Tradition might be applied to a particular set of circumstances.

Wells also identifies the underlying narrative assumptions that undergird Christian living and ethics (p.27). He identifies 'narratives' founded on sacred texts / scripture, and related to this, an approach that focuses on the 'events' of the biblical narrative. This is very much a propositional approach that seeks to construct a clear doctrinal framework from the biblical narrative to guide Christian living. The second narrative that Wells identifies is related to the subversive approach to ethics – this identifies within the gospel a preferential option of the poor and seeks an ethic that is just and liberating to groups that are identified as oppressed. This approach is the one used by liberation, feminist and indeed eco theologians.

The final narrative that Wells identifies as informing Christian living/ethics is that of the '... formation, development, and renewal of a sacred *people*.'(Wells, 2010b):

It is this people, the sacred community, that is the centre of ethical reflection. This is what God wants as his witness in the world and this companion in the kingdom. This is what Jesus came into the world to embody and gave his life to make possible. This is what the Bible was written to encourage and guide, and this is what theologians are called to resource and challenge. The sacred community is the touchstone of virtue. That which builds it up and enables it to be faithful is good and right and true; that which attempts to bypass it or contrives to render it invisible or undermines it from within is dubious, misguided or dangerous. (Wells 2010b, p. 28)

This passage clearly links the narrative of scripture and the formation of an ecclesial community, and places the Church, that ecclesial community, as central to revelation.

However Wells also identifies three clear temptations that flow from this narrative of the '...formation, development and renewal of a sacred people' (p.30-31). The first is to see the world (extra-ecclesia) as the primary forum for doing theological reflection - the danger of this, he posits, is that it distracts Christians into positions of worldly power, and adopt a Pelagian approach to salvation, liberation and the redemption of the world – we begin to think it depends on us as individuals rather than the corporate witness of the Church in the world. The second temptation is the opposite of the first - it mistakes God's choice of his people (the Church) as his primary mode of agency in the world, with a disregard for that world. This is seen in the emergence of neo-exclusive ecclesiologies (Mannion, 2007). The third temptation identified by Wells is simply that of a resurgent Gnosticism, which sees the Church, the sacred people, as a privileged few to whom the secrets of salvation have been disclosed. Such ecclesiologies promote a strong emphasis on individual salvation and are a particular characteristic of certain kinds of contemporary charismatic congregations.

Wells summarises this narrative rooting Christian ethics/living in a story of a sacred people thus:

The church, the sacred community, is understood as the focus of God's purposes for the world, the witness of his grace, and the earnest of the destiny he has prepared for all creation – friendship with God... Through reading Scripture, baptising, sharing communion, seeking God's forgiveness, being reconciled with one another, interceding, making peace, the church incorporates its tradition and offers a priestly ministry to the world. The church constantly reflects on the way it performs these practices, seeking always to be shaped into the life of Christ by carrying them out faithfully. Narrative and practices form *witnesses* – disciples who embody the church's life in prayer and service. These witnesses are the church's truth claim – it has no purchase on truth that is detached

from the transformation of lives and communities brought about by its narrative and practices. (Wells 2010b, p.33)

Such an approach offers a clear theological response to MacIntyre' assertion that virtuous character can and should be formed through narrative and community. Here we have seen an intimate link between narrative and the community it forms/that forms it. But now however we need to explore the relationship between narrative and the two primary sacraments of the Church, Baptism and Eucharist.

#### *Baptism*

The sacrament of Baptism offers a clear focus on both narrative and community. In Baptism the individual embraces the new narrative of Christianity as normative in his or her life and in so doing joins the community of others who have done likewise. This tethering of an individual to a new normative narrative begins the process we identified above of re-authoring or co-authoring one's own personal narrative. That narrative now engages with both the Christian narrative of Scripture and Tradition and also the corporate narratives manifest in those who also make up the community of faith. It is this that begins the transformation of the individual.

Such an approach concords with the approach to scripture primarily as a narrative discourse as opposed to a propositional one that we examined above. Hauerwas is keen to emphasise this point:

The nature of Christian ethics is determined by the fact that Christian convictions take the form of a story, or perhaps better set of stories that constituted tradition, which in turn creates and forms community. Christian ethics does not begin by emphasising rules or principles, but by calling our attention to a narrative that tells of God's dealing with creation. (Hauerwas 1983, p.24)



He challenges those who say that somehow there is a 'point' behind scripture that can somehow be separated from it; it is only through the performance of the biblical narrative that we can come to know God. For Hauerwas the function of scripture is to form the community of faith into the people God would have them be. Training in holiness is the essence of the life of the disciple, and of the Church, and that training involves our ongoing engagement with the biblical narrative, and such an engagement goes beyond propositional statements to a reordering of our personalities:

Christian ethics, therefore, is not first of all concerned with "thou shalt" or "thou shalt not." Its first task is to help us rightly envision the world. (p.29)

Loughlin draws on the work of Kenneth Surin when he asserts that Baptism is not about denying what we were before, but rather transforming it – 'what has been is no longer what has to be' (Loughlin 1999, p.217) . Loughlin also speaks of the idea of 'baptismal immersion as narrative' (p.216). In so doing he refers to Lindbeck's concept of an absorbent text, though Loughlin is quick to point out that this needs to be understood as the believer absorbing the life-giving text, rather than being absorbed by it. He further quotes Surin's claims of the Church as a 'narrative space' into which the baptised enter, and in which they are reshaped by allowing themselves to be 'interrogated' by the performance of the biblical texts. This, Surin claims, is the fundamental disposition of a disciple (p. 217).

Davidson & Milbank draw upon Pauline imagery to make the same point – Baptism for them is about incorporation into the body of Christ, into the Christian narrative, and it is this very incorporation that is the essence of salvation. They also draw on bridal imagery and the image of 'being clothed with Christ' to make the same point (Davidson and Milbank, 2010). These images are classic readings of the theology of baptism and are not unhelpful to our understanding of the role of narrative in forming a sacred people, but

we need to be somewhat careful about mechanistic models of the Sacraments, an issue we will revisit below.

### ***Eucharist***

If Baptism represents initiation into the Christian narrative, into the community of faith, then the Eucharist represents our ongoing nurture within that narrative. The Eucharist recreates again and again that 'narrative space' (cf. Surin), through a distillation of the narrative into ritual. Here the mysteries of the faith are played out and encountered. Through the Eucharist we 'inwardly digest' the narrative of faith. Davidson & Milbank note St. Augustine's words that it is in the Eucharist that we receive what we already are. (Davidson & Milbank 2010 p.56) For Loughlin this 'eating of book' is the culmination of narrative theology (Loughlin, 1999). The image of St. John the Divine eating the scroll in Revelation 10.9-10 illustrates the point for him. This internalisation of narrative, this consumption of the Logos, he suggests, is the primary metaphor for the transformation that takes place through membership of the people who are defined by the Christian narrative.

A number of writers have sought to root Christian Ethics/living within the liturgical framework of the Eucharist. The most impressive example of this is *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Hauerwas and Wells, 2004), while Davidson & Milbank (2010) and Wells (2010a) have provided shorter reviews. These reviews draw out the following points in relation to the Eucharistic formation of a sacred people, which I summarise briefly below.

**The Gathering:** The community gathers because God calls it to do so. This is not an exclusive or sectarian community, but a representative one, offering itself in worship on behalf of the world. The gathering marks the community as vicarious. The centrality of the biblical narrative is marked either by the processing of the Book of the Gospels or by the central position of a generally large copy of the scriptures (Davidson and Milbank, 2010).

**The Confession:** This reveals to us the distance between the reality of our lives, individual and corporate, and the normative narrative of faith. This is a process of re-orientation and recommitment.

**The Gloria:** This is an affirmation of the power of the narrative, the power of forgiveness received, to which praise and thanksgiving is a natural response.

**The Liturgy of the Word:** Here the narrative takes centre stage, here we are confronted with, and collide with, the text. The text is read out loud and thus is constituted as a 'living text'. Davidson & Milbank quote Hauerwas' assertion that scripture is fundamentally unintelligible until interpreted by the community of faith, thus a 'breaking open of the Word' by an authorised member of the community follows. The purpose of this is to enable the community to 'digest' the narrative. (p.215)

**The Intercessions:** Here we explore the gap between the normative vision of the community and their lived experience in the world, and seek to connect the two. Wesley Carr points out that intercession has less to do with telling God what he ought to be doing and more about internalising the gap between narrative and reality and finding the inner resources to do something to bridge it (Carr, 1989).

**The Peace:** This makes overt the narrative's demand that the community should be a community of peace and reconciliation. There is perhaps also something habituating about this, as there is about this whole process of liturgical formation, by sharing peace, we become peace (Wells, 2010a).

**The Offertory:** Here we learn to offer our gifts and ourselves in God's service; here we truly become part of the narrative as we unite our sacrifice with that of Jesus on the cross/altar.

**The Eucharistic Prayer:** Dom Gregory Dix (after Augustine) identified the fourfold action of the Eucharist as 1) Taking, 2) Blessing, 3) Breaking, and 4) Distributing (Dix 1945). This is then perhaps the tightest distillation of the narrative. This pattern then becomes the pattern for our lives, it becomes part of who we are.

**The Dismissal:** So finally the ‘sacred people’ of the community of faith are sent out, are distributed, to witness and serve in the world. Davidson & Milbank are at pains to emphasise that this process in no way dilutes the corporate nature of the Church – we go out as a body, as a dispersed community, only to re-gather as God’s vicarious people at the next opportunity.

This extremely quick summary of the way the liturgy of the Eucharist embodies both the narrative and communal aspects of the Christian Tradition, seeks to demonstrate the intrinsically sacramental nature of a narrative approach. Thus I would argue that, if MacIntyre is correct and virtuous character is formed by both narrative and community, the sacramental tradition of the Church has some distinctive gifts to offer.

### **3.2 The Fruit of Ecclesial Character - Sanctification**

The essence of what we are exploring here can be summarised by a verse from St. John’s Gospel:

And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. (John 17.19)

By a faithful engagement with the normative narrative of scripture, the Church consents to becoming a sacramental ‘narrative space’ wherein is mediated God’s will for world, God’s will for the character of His kingdom. By its nature as a locus of mediation, the Church becomes an agent in the reconciliation of the world and therefore by its holiness the Church, by God’s

grace, makes the world holy. So it is to the subject of holiness and sanctification that we now turn our attention.

Hauerwas has written at some length on this subject (Hauerwas, 1975, 1998). Throughout his corpus is a wrestling with the distinctiveness of the Christian community and their engagement with the wider society, not least in his provocatively named *Resident Aliens* (1989). He summarises his position thus:

By virtue of the distinctive narrative that forms their community, Christians are distinct from the world. They are required to be nothing less than a sanctified people of peace who can live the life of the forgiven. Their sanctification is not meant to sustain the judgement that they are “better” than non-Christians, but rather that they are charged to be faithful to God’s calling of them as a foretaste of the kingdom. In this sense sanctification is a life of service and sacrifice that the world cannot account for on its own grounds.  
(Hauerwas 1983, p.60)

Hauerwas’ reading of sanctification was subject to a detailed critique in a paper by Patricia B Jung (Jung, 1983). Hauerwas subsequently reviewed his approach and took on board much of what Jung had challenged (Hauerwas, 1998). Nonetheless, her paper remains an important one, and one worth detailed engagement with at this point.

In seeking to first articulate Hauerwas’ then approach to sanctification, Jung quotes his oft-repeated adage that we cannot see/ know until we have been trained to see/know properly. This, for Hauerwas, is the essence of sanctification – it is through engagement with the Christian narrative that we learn to see properly.

The agent must allow the Gospel story to tell itself through his or her life, and by so doing, be transformed by and come to characterize the story. (Jung, 1983)

Implicit in this quotation is the fact that it is through engagement with, and performance of, the narrative of faith that Christian character is formed and sanctified – errors, delusions and self-deceptions are identified and the opportunity to re-script given (Jung, 1983).

Jung however believes that Hauerwas' articulation of the process of sanctification is not comprehensive enough. She criticises him for an 'intellectualistic' approach that is primarily cognitive, and, by implication, of a limited conception of agency. Her argument is simply that sanctification extends to those actions and responses over which we have voluntary control, but also over those actions and responses that are involuntary. This offers a powerful view of habituation and Jung draws on Ricoeur's philosophy of the will to offer a comprehensive and holistic model of sanctification. This consists of a) value orientation, b) moral competencies and c) pattern of consent. She makes the point that this involves not simply an intellectualistic, cognitive approach but also a rooted, earthy, corporeality (Jung 1983).

Jung begins her in-depth analysis with the sanctification of bodily need, specifically hunger. Is this voluntary or involuntary? Jung suggests that it can ultimately be controlled by exercise of the will as exemplified by hunger strikers. She offers the role of the imagination as a discipline that can bring such needs, not accessible to the conscious, volitional mind, under control. Jung argues that this has enormous implications for sanctification within the community of faith:

I seek merely to demonstrate that the community of the faithful has an enormous capacity to shape and socialize the agent's imagination, and thus has the potential capacity to sanctify even the organic level

of his or her value orientation in a meaningful sense. (Jung 1983, p.81)

From involuntary bodily needs, Jung turns her attention to the sanctification of affections. She is deeply critical of those who claim that only entirely rational acts are moral, that moral acts must be detached from emotions. Such claims, she says, deny human embodiment. Embodiment, Jung suggests, means that emotions/affections are intrinsically linked to thought patterns and these two are not easily separated. She goes even further to claim that the main motivating factor behind reason is its 'affective appeal' (p.82). She questions how involuntary all emotions are saying that while some are relatively involuntary others are accessible to the will. It is however that embodied connection between emotion and reason that is the best hope of sanctification, and Jung suggests that '...through the power of practice, these affections, along with the reasons they colour, can become habitual and solidify into a value orientation or moral vision' (p.83). Jung is not claiming that all emotions are accessible by such means - the point she is making is that at least some of them are.

Not only does Jung identify a link between emotion and reason, she identifies a clear link between emotion and bodily response, indeed most bodily responses to emotion are involuntary. One of the effects of significant emotional/physical reactions is to act as an obstacle to thought and thus one of the challenges for the individual agent is to set aside disempowering emotional and physical reactions and retain some level of rational volitional control over a situation (p.84) – this according to Jung is the definition of competency. The challenge of the moral sanctified life is to develop a greater range of competencies throughout our lives, to gain a greater level of control, and Jung suggests that this is often achieved through physical disciplines impacting our affective lives. She gives the example of soldiers who undergo a large amount of physical training, not simply to make them fit for combat, but also to enable them to gain a greater emotional control so as to act proportionally and rationally in times of great stress (p.84).

Jung concludes this section of her paper by recapping her claim that sanctification is not simply cognitive and intellectual, but also affective and corporal. The proof of the pudding is the ability of the individual to be able to control their response in a situation where hitherto they would have been out of control and at the whim of their emotional and physical reactions. (p.85)

Jung could never be accused of 'blueprint conceptions of sanctification'. She quotes Ricoeur's 'involuntary consequences of embodiment' – a) temperament, b) the unconscious and c) bodily necessity (p.86). She identifies the limits to potential sanctification that these constraints give. Firstly, however great the process of sanctification, the temperament of the agent will seldom change – sanctification operates within the bounds of temperament. The unconscious structure of the individual agent impacts their 'moral orientation' significantly, but in a much more ill defined way than temperament. It is Jung's contention that sanctification will not impact on the make-up and structure of this in any significant way (p.87). Bodily necessity refers to the human lifecycle, to the fact that we get frail and die. Jung sees more potential for the work of sanctification in this area, and here we return to the re-making, re-creating of personal narratives in the light of the acceptance of the Christian narrative as normative. Jung writes about this in terms of consent and says that when we consent to see our lives within the context of the normative value of the Christian narrative, then the individual is better able to live with the consequence of bodily necessity, of frailty and death, primarily in the light of Resurrection.

This complex material that Jung offers is important because it presents a realistic and embodied understanding of sanctification. This contrasts with Hauerwas' more theoretical and idealistic approach. Jung suggests that there are limits this side of death to the potential for sanctification, but also great possibilities, she sums it up thus:



Sanctification themes refer to the affective and intellectual reorganisation of the agent's value orientation. They also confirm the development and deployment of moral competencies and the agents' graciously assisted struggle to consent. All of these themes have a common goal: to overcome habitual forms of evil. Sanctification is that gradual process whereby agents strive by the grace of God to disentangle their moral lives from the crippling power of sin. (p.88)

Finally Jung turns her attention to sin. There is the often volitional sin of 'self-deceptions and illusions' – this is the mode of sin that Hauerwas engages with according to Jung (p.88). But she identifies a deeper darker sin, a sin that is 'unintelligible and elusive'. This sin is a particular temptation for Christian ethicists and those who have a concern for the formation of character through habituation. Again she borrows a phrase from Ricoeur to describe this - 'automatism'. This is this the sin of one's habitual disciplines becoming domesticated, of losing their impact; rather than facilitating change and the growth of character, they simply serve to keep things as they are (p. 89). She quotes Ricoeur:

Ossification is a threat inscribed in habit, but not it normal destiny.  
(Ricoeur 1966:300 in Jung 1983 p.89)

This detailed engagement with Jung's concept of sanctification in the light of embodiment has attempted to examine the consequences of sanctification that are implicit in a sacramental narrative theology of the Church. Jung's insights are particularly helpful in that they root the practice and potential of sanctification within the reality and sin of embodied human life. Yet it is this very fragile sanctity that the Church as Sacramental Communion is called to embody and share with the world in God's name. It must be emphasised that the process of sanctification examined here is not simply for the greater glory of the individual or indeed the community of faith, but as a witness and resource to the wider world. We will explore how this works in a subsequent chapter, but it is not possible to overemphasise the

vicarious nature of sanctification at this point – this is about agency not simply ontology!

### **3.3 Conclusion**

This chapter then has sought to map out a theology of ecclesial character. This was necessary because of a perceived failure of that character in recent years in the Church's engagement with society. It has taken its lead from MacIntyre's call for a reappropriation of virtuous character, formed through narrative and community. A study of narrative theology has demonstrated a rediscovery of the centrality of narrative readings of scripture and the liturgical performance thereof. Both Loughlin and Wells articulate a narrative theology that has significant implications for the formation of Christian character, individual and corporate. This approach rejects the foundationalism of previous generations and indeed some of the hermeneutic tools used in exegesis. Of primary concern for narrative theologians is the performance of the normative text within a ritual context. The ritual performance of the normative narrative serves to form and shape the community that performs it, but it is important for that community to realise that the purpose of this formation and shaping goes beyond its own nature, and is undertaken on behalf of God's mission in the world.

There is a logical flow from the performance of the normative narrative to the sacramental life of the Church, both through the adoption of the Christian narrative as normative at Baptism, and its ongoing internalisation in the Eucharist. A community thus formed sacramentally will by implication be a sacramental community, an eschatological sign of the kingdom, not simply a means to an end or an end in itself. A sacramental theology of mediation and agency demonstrates how this community becomes an agent of redemption in the world.

The effect of this sacramental formation is of a sanctified character, but this sanctification is not to be seen as something that is only rational and cognitive. The work of Patti Jung demonstrates not only how sanctification

engages not only those aspects of our character that we have voluntary control over, but also the involuntary reactions that are a result of our embodiment. Jung's approach to sanctification is itself embodied and while identifying the possibilities of sanctification she also identifies its limitations, not least the threats of sin to the process.

Having described the theological parameters for the recovery of ecclesial character, the next chapter of my thesis will go on and examine the 'practices' that make up the performance of the narrative on which that character is based.

## Chapter 4: Practice makes Perfect

In the previous chapter I explored the rootedness of ecclesial character within both narrative and community. These two concepts were then explored within the context of the dominical sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. This concluded in the assertion that Christian character, individual and ecclesial, was sacramentally formed, and that character so formed was sacramental by nature. Ecclesial character was then explored through an exploration of sacramental mediation. The relationship between sacraments and sanctification was then discussed, drawing on the work of Patti Jung, which emphasises an embodied sanctification over and against a model of sanctification that is overly intellectualistic. This Chapter seeks to explore not dissimilar territory from a different angle, with a particular emphasis on pedagogical aspects of character/identity formation.

Much of the argument of my thesis originates in Alistair MacIntyre's call for the reappropriation of an ethic of Virtue (MacIntyre, 1981). Central to MacIntyre's proposal is the understanding of the concept of 'practice'. This chapter opens with an exploration of MacIntyre's understanding of 'practices' and their relationship to virtue. Of particular interest in relation to the formation of character is MacIntyre's contrasting of internal and external goods. These concepts are examined theologically and shown to yield much of value in terms of understanding spiritual practice.

MacIntyre is not alone in having written about practices in recent years. The role of 'practices' within situated learning has been written about by Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave. This has led to the articulation of the concept of Communities of Practice. Wenger describes the theoretical underpinning of this concept in his book *Communities of Practice – learning, meaning, and identity* (1998). This text merits examination in some considerable detail and I suggest offers much of interest to ecclesiological discourse, not least within the lived experience of ecclesial communities. Wenger's placing of Participation and Reification at the heart of a Community of Practice resonates with much that was examined in the previous chapter on

Sacraments and Sanctification. The concept of Reification particularly has close resonances with a theology of mediation. As we will see, there is much to be mined here for a learning Church, where identity and character are discovered as part of the learning process.

I will also examine some of the shortcomings in a practice-based approach to ecclesiological discourse, through the work of Nicholas Healy. As we shall see, Healy contends that practice alone is too weak a concept to build discipleship on, as it takes no account of the motivation of the practitioner. There must be an inner movement of intention and attention if the practice is to have life.

The chapter will conclude with a proposal as to how a practice-oriented ecclesiology can serve the development of ecclesial character and thus renew its life and mission in a manner that is virtuous. This proposal centres on a reading of ecclesial /ascetical practices as 'transitional phenomena' as described in the work of the British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott.

#### **4.1 MacIntyre and Practices**

##### **4.1.1 MacIntyre's conception of a Practice**

The contention of this thesis is that the Church needs to rediscover itself as a virtuous community if it is to regain its self-confidence and a renewed integrity in its life and mission. MacIntyre's assertion on *After Virtue* (1981) is that this is easier said than done due to the complete fragmentation of moral philosophy (and by extension, moral theology) in contemporary society. According to MacIntyre there are three constituent parts in the reconstruction of a moral discourse, '...practice... the narrative order of a single human life and...an account of what constitutes a moral tradition.'(1981). The narrative aspect of this search was examined in the last chapter; here we examine MacIntyre's understanding of practice.

MacIntyre defines a practice thus:

... any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve the standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (MacIntyre 1981, p.187)

This is a complex statement that contains much that merits further investigation. I will review the notions of social establishment and internal goods in detail shortly, suffice it for the moment to recognise the importance MacIntyre places on the centrality of excellence within the concept of a practice. In so doing he draws on Aristotelian notions of virtue. He asserts that this excellence is not subjective but is an objective reality inherent in the practice and by which the practitioner/agent is judged:

A practice involves standards of excellence and obedience to rules as well as the achievement of goods. To enter into a practice is to accept the authority of those standards and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them. It is to subject my own attitudes, choices, preferences and tastes to the standards which currently and partially defined the practice. (p.190)

MacIntyre however is quick to point out that this excellence is not limited to the practice itself but that all practice has within it the expectation of the excellence of life of the practitioner (p.190). For MacIntyre practices are not simply self-referential, but are answerable to a set of (socially developed) standards. How these standards might be achieved and negotiated we shall see more clearly when we examine the work of Etienne Wenger, suffice it to note here that they are not subjective or characteristic of emotivism.

MacIntyre is keen to remind his readers that practices should never be conceived merely as a set of technical skills, but that those skills are

“...transformed and enriched by those extensions of human powers and by that regard for its own internal goods which are partially definitive of each particular practice or type of practice.”(p.193) So practices have a transforming effect upon those who practice them, and all of this needs to be seen within a teleology of the development virtuous character. So alongside MacIntyre’s definition of practice we must put his definition of virtue, which he describes thus:

A virtue is an acquired human quality possession and exercise which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods. (MacIntyre 1981 p.191)

So for MacIntyre there is a clear two-way relationship between practices and virtue but to understand this completely we must distinguish between a virtue (or the virtues) and Virtue; a virtue enables an individual/community to access the internal goods of a practice in a way what would be impossible in its absence; while practices, along with narrative and an explicit moral tradition, create the wider conditions for the development of the broader concept of Virtue.

#### **4.1.2 Internal and External Goods**

Central to MacIntyre’s understanding of practices is notion of ‘goods’. Goods, he claims, are internal to an activity and are ‘realised’ by trying to achieve excellence in that activity through a ‘practice’. Furthermore he posits that the ability to achieve excellence and the conception of the goods involved is ‘systematically extended’ by engagement with the practice. (p.187)

This is a hugely significant definition as it makes two important points. Firstly particular activities latently contain certain ‘goods’ and thus our choice of activity must be informed by the expectation of the good that will be realised by that activity. Different activities will yield different goods e.g.

property development will yield different goods to those yielded by a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella. Thus there is an implied teleology in our choice of activity, perhaps echoed by the writer to the Philippians:

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4.8-9)

The second significant point MacIntyre makes is that the more we engage in a particular practice the more it yields its goods. So the more we commit to those activities that build virtue the more virtuous a character will be formed, and conversely the more we avoid or ignore virtuous practices the less likely it is that a virtuous character will be created.

The relationship between internal and external goods and virtue is explored further by MacIntyre when he emphasises internal goods can only be achieved and realised by the possession of the virtues. He is at pains to point out while it may be possible to fake the possession of the virtues only their actual possession will facilitate the achievement of the internal goods of a practice. Indeed he goes further to suggest that the genuine possession of the virtues may well preclude and disable the acquisition of some of the external goods of a practice (p.196).

This distinction can perhaps also be understood by correlation with the notions of intrinsic and extrinsic religious motivation developed by Allport & Ross (1967). Intrinsic motivation/internal goods are those things that are done for the rightness of their doing; they are done for their own sakes. Whereas for extrinsic motivation/external goods the motivation factor is what the agent gets or achieves on account of having preformed the practice. Virtuous practice then is concerned with the performance of the



act or practice on its own terms, regardless of what may or may not be gained by its performance.

External goods, MacIntyre defines as being similar to possessions – they are subject to ownership and are by their nature subject to scarcity and limitation. This he suggests means that they are focuses of competition amongst individual and groups. These are the goods of external success, visible and measurable. In the context of religious belief Allport & Ross have a slightly different approach but one that nonetheless chimes with what MacIntyre is suggesting, they state that the external rewards of religious practice/church membership might include “...sociability and distraction, status and self-justification”. (Allport 1959 in Wulff 1997 p. 232)

Such an orientation begs serious questions for religious practitioners and the development of ecclesial character. Can virtuous character be formed when the emphasis is always on the external rewards (usually visible and immediate) of ecclesial practice? I think MacIntyre is clear – it cannot. His whole approach would seem to challenge the search for immediate visible rewards.

Internal goods in contrast are not subject to the rules of limitation and scarcity and can be shared boundlessly, as MacIntyre says “...when Turner transformed the seascape in painting or W G Grace advance the art of batting in cricket in a quite new way their achievement enriched the whole relevant community.” (p.190). These are activities that we do because they are the right things to do. This too is Allport & Ross’s understanding – for them an intrinsic orientation in religious practice is based on a commitment to the practice of faith on its own terms and not as a means to achieve other things. For them, the formation of virtuous character is something much more long term and invisible. In the end for MacIntyre it comes down to a matter of motivation or teleology – virtuous people do the right things because they are the right things to do and by doing them they become more virtuous.

It is perhaps important to draw a distinction here between Virtue Ethics (a title MacIntyre is always wary of) and a more Kantian approach. Both would assert that it is important to do the right thing, to act correctly, however the difference again is in the motivation. Kantian/deontological ethics create a hierarchy of action that must be undertaken regardless of motivation – you must do the right thing whether or not you know it to be the right thing or want to do it. MacIntyre and other virtue ethicists suggest that we do the right thing because we have developed the inner virtues to discern internally what is the right thing to do as opposed to being told externally and as a result we do so willingly rather than grudgingly.

#### **4.1.3 Theological Reflection on MacIntyre's theory of Practices**

This examination of the centrality of the concept of 'practices' within MacIntyre's search for a teleology of virtuous character has I suggest yielded much of interest for our search for an ecclesial character based on virtue. The clear acknowledgement of practice as central to the formation is essence of all ascetical theology. It reflects the designation of the Early Church not in the first instance as a new philosophical structure but as an earthed Way of Life. The Christian community is not primarily gathered around a simple assent to a set of philosophical proposals, but rather a commitment to the performance and practice of a common narrative, albeit in widely differing contexts.

This performance, this practice, then can in the light of MacIntyre's assertions be seen as containing 'goods', both internal and external, that are realised by such a performance/practice. The contrast between internal and external goods is not unfamiliar either and points to the temptation to use religious practice as a vehicle of personal gratification and advancement in life or as a means to the formation of virtuous and Godly character. Jesus' regular disputes with the Pharisees would seem to encapsulate this dynamic well. It should however be recognised that a certain level of external goods

are required for effective living and we must be careful not to create too great a dichotomy between internal and external goods.

So MacIntyre affirms ongoing rightly motivated practice as a primary tool in the formation of virtuous character. It is the contention of this thesis that that is the case in ecclesial discourse as well. The character of the Church will be formed by the internal goods realised through the practices and disciplines of discipleship. This clearly resonates with the theological trajectory drawn in the previous chapter of the sacramental performance of the biblical narrative being a primary key to the process of sanctification (the formation of Godly, virtuous character).

Many of the themes articulated by MacIntyre are echoed and developed by other writers, both by conscious derivation and development and by chance. In the field of pedagogy Etienne Wenger in particular has explored the relationship between practice and the formation of identity, which once again will offer much to reflect on in our search for a virtuous Church, and it is to him that we turn next.

## **4.2 Wenger on Practices**

### **4.2.1 The Concept of Practice**

Wenger and his collaborator Jean Lave have stimulated significant interest in the concept of practice in organisational and educational circles.<sup>57</sup> In analysing workplace habits and trying to develop a social theory of learning from them, they have articulated the concept of Communities of Practice. Wenger is quick to point out that they didn't invent the concept of a Community of Practice – Communities of Practice have been around as long as human society has been – they simply described and articulated what they saw going on (Wenger 1998). Wenger describes Communities of Practice as '...groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact

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<sup>57</sup> Wenger's importance as an interlocutor is described in the Introduction.

regularly.’ (Wenger 2006, p.1). He says that we all belong to communities of practice of one kind or another, even if we don’t understand them as such. I contend that the model of Communities of Practice unsurprisingly offers much for the student of ecclesiology on which to reflect.

Wenger’s conception of a practice differs somewhat from that offered by MacIntyre, being almost cultural and certainly embracing both conscious and unconscious aspects of practice:

...a concept of practice includes both the explicit and tacit. It includes what is said and what is left unsaid: but is represented and what is assumed. It includes the language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specified criteria, codified procedures, regulations, and contracts that various practices make explicit for a variety of purposes. But it also includes all the implicit relations, tacit conventions, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, recognisable institutions, specific perceptions, well tuned sensitivities, embodied understandings, underlying assumptions, and shared worldviews. Most of these may never be articulated, yet they are unmistakable signs of membership in communities of practice and are crucial to the success of the enterprises. (Wenger 1998, p.47)

#### ***4.2.2 Negotiation of Meaning***

##### **Participation**

One constant theme that appears in all the writers I have mentioned is the social nature of practice. While certain practices may be performed in isolation they are not constructed in isolation. MacIntyre couldn’t be clearer, a practice is a ‘... socially established cooperative human activity...’ (MacIntyre 1981 p.187) He sees this working at different levels - and he is keen to emphasise that the social nature of a practice exists across time as well as being socially constructed within the present:

To enter into a practice is to enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also with those who preceded us in the practice, particularly those whose achievements extended the reach of the practice to its present point. It is thus the achievement, and *a fortiori* the authority, the tradition which I then confront and from which I have to learn. (p.194)

Wenger too is keen to emphasise the social nature of the concept of practice, and like MacIntyre is keen to place it within a historical and well as social context, and it is because of this context that a practice is meaningful (Wenger 1998)

From this Wenger draws out one of his most significant and central conclusions – meaning and identity are negotiated concepts, in other words they are, to a greater or lesser extent, socially constructed, and it is through practices that this negotiation is undertaken. We will go on and examine exactly how this works but is it perhaps worthwhile first examining how the concept of social constructionism fits with theological notion of revelation. At first it would seem that the two are mutually exclusive, but Percy suggests that the social construction of revelation is not something we need fear. He says,

...to speak of the social construction of revelation is to have some understanding of how human or social agencies function; how they acquire a mystique, or are sacralized; the delicate and multifarious ways in which the *opus hominum* and *opus dei* combine; how the divine and human pulses, activity and performances are conflated in such a way to make 'religion'. (Percy 2006, p.10)

Percy is quick to point out that in claiming that revelation can be understood as a social construction, he is not claiming that such a claim is exclusive or exhaustive. He goes on to speak about what he calls the theological

construction of reality. This occurs when secular language is supplanted by sacred language:

...what one person may describe as catharsis will be, to another, conversion; one person's coincidence will be another person's moment of grace or religious destiny. (p.10)

All of this makes an important point about the nature of religious faith and one that will become more significant when we examine the notion of transitional phenomena and the work of the British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott.

So, central to Wenger's model of a Community of Practice is the notion that meaning and identity are socially constructed and what he does is to map out how this happens.

In describing what he means by the negotiation of meaning Wenger asserts that such a negotiation is both dynamic and historical within a context that is at times both rigid and flexible, and encompasses a wide variety of influences and factors, and which may serve to create a new resolution of meaning or identity, that however successful it may be, will always only be provisional (Wenger 1998).

This negotiation then is framed by two activities - Participation and Reification.

### **Participation**

Participation simply means engaging with and taking part in social communities. Wenger speaks of an 'identity of participation', key to which is an attitude of mutual recognition (p.56). He is keen to point out that there is a difference between participation and collaboration. Participation as Wenger sees it covers a wide range of social interactions, equal and unequal, "...conflictual as well as harmonious, intimate as well as political, competitive as well as cooperative." (p.56). This spirit of participation goes

wider than specific practices and is in essence an approach to life, though which both we and the communities we participate in are changed and transformed.

In the world of the Church participation is the *sine qua non*. Baptism, Christian initiation, is at least in theory, the beginning of participation in the community of faith wherein revelation is constantly reinterpreted and renegotiated.

### **Reification**

The way the community of faith engages with revelation is through the sacramental life of the Church – the Word becomes flesh/material, the experience is narrated into a story which is written down in a book, the story is condensed into a meal; renewal is marked with a symbolic washing, drowning and rebirth; the invisible actions of the Holy Spirit are made visible by anointing with oil. In short, the Church reifies concepts. It is this process of *reification* that Wenger marks as the second key activity in the negotiation of meaning. He quotes the Webster's dictionary definition:

To treat (an abstraction) as substantially existing, or as a concrete material object.. (Wenger 1998 p.58).

Here immediately we have echoes of Percy's social construction of revelation. Yet herein also lies a great danger particularly for religious practice and discourse – the temptation to fundamentalism, the temptation to believe that the concrete objects we have made to represent our abstractions are real. The danger is that we lose sight of the provisionality of our newly reified concept and trip over into what in theological language we would call idolatry. Wenger warns of this:

But the power of reification – its succinctness, its portability, its potential physical presence, its focusing effect – is also its danger. The politician's slogan can become a substitute for a deep

understanding of and commitment to what it stands for. The tool can ossify activity around its inertness. Procedures can hide broader meanings in blind sequences of operations. And knowledge of a formula can lead to the illusion that one fully understands the processes it describes. (p.61)

Notwithstanding these dangers, reification is an enormously powerful, flexible concept and can take many forms. Wenger suggests that it can refer to processes as much as to objects or products; it can emerge in a spontaneous and unplanned fashion and doesn't need to have been planned or designed. Where it has been planned or designed it needs to be owned at the local level at which it is being used.

The similarities between the concept of reification and the sacramental life of the Church would seem to be clear. Reification, it would seem, is a pedagogical name for the process of mediation we examined in the previous chapter. As the sacraments and the community that celebrate them are inseparable, so Wenger asserts that in the negotiation of meaning it is essentially impossible to separate out participation and reification – they become one in the same action, participation reifies and reification requires participation.

Thus I would suggest that Wenger's notion of the negotiation of meaning through both participation and reification has much that is familiar to us in our search for how the character of the Church is formed. We must however not stop here, because Communities of Practice have yet more to offer us in this enquiry.

The social dynamic of negotiated meaning is further developed by Wenger when he suggests three dimensions inherent in participation in a community of practice.



### Mutual Engagement

The first of these is a commitment to *mutual engagement*. At its most basic this is about a real engagement between the members of a community if meaning and identity are to be negotiated. Every community of practice must include whatever it takes to initiate this mutual engagement (p.74). Just as we saw above that membership of a community of practice does not imply collaboration, but can be conflictual, so it would be wrong to assume that this commitment to mutual engagement would lead to homogeneity...

Mutual relations of engagement are as likely to give rise to differentiation as to homogenisation. Crucially, therefore, homogeneity is neither a requirement for nor the result of, the development of a community of practice. (p.76)

So mutual engagement develops relationships but these do not necessarily lead to collaboration or homogeneity. This, Wenger points out, should challenge idealised notions of community (p.76). Communities of practice are not communitarian idylls; they are hard-hitting centres of negotiation and all that goes with it. So within a community of practice there is a commitment to mutual engagement however difficult that may be.

### Joint Enterprise

The second dimension that enables a community of practice is a commitment to a *joint enterprise*. While there may be diversity and disagreement as to how goals are achieved, there is a common telos. Again Wenger suggest that we should not assume that this joint enterprise is self-evident (p.77) – a community may spend some considerable time negotiating the definition of its joint enterprise, or rearticulating in its own terms the enterprise handed to it from senior managers. It is only when there is ownership of a joint enterprise that members can genuinely hold each other accountable for its realisation. Indeed the community may be operating for quite some time before the exact nature of that joint enterprise becomes clear, and the community will need to continue to renegotiate its understanding of its joint enterprise as it develops. Wenger

makes the point that no community of practice is a 'self-contained entity' but is shaped '... in larger contexts – historical, social, cultural, institutional – with specific resources and constraints.'(p.79). Communities of practice are richly textured entities and as well as the dynamics above are subject to interactions and overlaps with other communities of practice as individuals belong to a variety of communities within the totality of their lives. How communities handle multimembership and boundary issues is significant in the negotiation of the articulation of a joint enterprise as well as the larger issues of meaning and identity.

### **Shared Repertoire**

The final dimension that builds coherence in a community of practice is that of a *shared repertoire*. This repertoire contains many of the products and processes that Wenger used to define a practice – he defines it thus:

The repertoire of a community of practice includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice. The repertoire combines both reificative and participative aspects. It includes the discourse by which members create meaningful statements about the world, as well as the styles by which they express their forms of membership and their identity as members. (p.83)

For Wenger the term repertoire signifies something that has a history ('a rehearsed character') and yet is also open to modification and reinterpretation in future performance.

These three dimensions are fascinating when examined ecclesologically. Is there real commitment to genuine mutual engagement in the contemporary Church of England or indeed in the wider ecumenical movement? One of the problems with such a question is to define the level of the church that you

are interrogating - parish, deanery, diocese, or national institutions? The answer is probably a very mixed picture; certainly where that mutual engagement is undertaken and undertaken well, the Church is accustomed to it being not homogeneous. As we have seen the ability to accept and handle diversity is important in a community of practice that is going to negotiate both meaning and identity, and it certainly will be a hallmark of a virtuous Church.

The same sort of questions can be asked of the Church of England's commitment to a joint enterprise - how would this be negotiated and articulated and would any articulation be owned by all of its active members, never mind its latent members and the nation at large? How does the Church negotiate and articulate in any meaningful way a joint enterprise at national, diocesan, deanery or even parish level that is owned and adhered to, and how would an ongoing negotiation and rearticulating of this be facilitated? It might be possible to respond to such a question by claiming that a formal negotiation and articulation might not be necessary as long as there is a tacit, implicit agreement – but how would the Church know if this was the case?

Perhaps the most interesting challenge for the contemporary Church is the third dimension, that of shared repertoire. To what exactly does repertoire apply in the Church - how broad and general do we want to be? Is it enough to say that we share a repertoire of adoration, confession, praise, intercession and thanksgiving, or do we need a tighter definition? Historically the Church of England has defined itself through adherence to the authorised liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer - are we to understand our contemporary repertoire as adherence to this and its legal successor Common Worship. What shared repertoire might we find between a charismatic evangelical praise service and an Anglo-Catholic pontifical high mass? As with joint enterprise, perhaps even where there is significant diversity in the presenting issues there might be enough common ground amongst the implicit and tacit.

It is beyond the remit of this paper to answer such questions, however they illustrate the richness that can be derived from a dialogue between the situated learning of communities of practice in negotiating meaning and identity with contemporary ecclesiology.

#### **4.2.2 Identity**

We have begun to see how Wenger traces the evolution of identity through practice, with the key aspects of practice being underpinned by the activities of Participation and Reification and a commitment to mutual engagement, joint enterprise and the development of a shared repertoire.

Wenger now makes a radical claim in the light of his argument to this point – he suggests that identity can be defined as much by non-participation as it can by participation. In other words what we chose not to do, who we chose not to engage with can be as defining as those we do. For example it could be said that our identity as a nation state is as much define by our government's unwillingness to negotiate with those who take our fellow citizens as hostages as it is by its engagement with our European partners. So notwithstanding the central importance of participation, we need to explore the dynamic of identity/character formation though non-participation as well.

Wenger identifies two modes of non-participation: *peripherality* and *marginality* (p. 165/6). He suggests that in the case of *peripherality*, this is primarily an attitude of non-participation that engages in a small amount of participation to allow for an identity of *peripherality*. Ecclesiologically, this is the non-attender who turns up at Christmas and Easter and perhaps a few social events throughout the year and so is known and recognised but is not a regular member of the congregation.

*Marginality* according to Wenger reverses this orientation. *Marginality* is essentially an orientation of participation, but limited or restricted

participation (p.166). So for example some who is a regular attender at Sunday worship, but who leaves very quickly afterwards without speaking to others, and while the individual is recognised by other members, they know little about them. So it becomes clear how individuals are able to create their identity by non- (or at least limited) participation in a community.

A similar delineation of identity can be seen corporately in the Church nationally and locally. We define ourselves by who we are willing to engage with and work in partnership with – whether we work simply with other voluntary sector organisations or whether we are willing to work with statutory agencies to build the Kingdom. Likewise I would suggest that non-participation with the Church is often used by others to define themselves – think of Alistair Campbell’s famous ‘we don’t do God’ statement. Perhaps two of the great challenges for the contemporary Church are to understand if an identity of non-participation is ever appropriate, and how to engage (should it wish to) with those whose identity is based on an element of non-participation.

#### **4.2.3 Three modes of Belonging**

This then begs the question of the relationship between participation and belonging. Does non-participation preclude a sense of belonging - does participation always imply belonging? How does one belong, and are there different modes of belonging? For a national church such as the Church of England these are critical issues. Wenger offers three modes of belonging to a community of practice, the first of these being ‘engagement’.

*Engagement* is the most straightforward of the three and we have examined it in some detail already. Wenger lists the threefold process of engagement as (p.174):

1. The ongoing negotiation of meaning
2. The formation of trajectories

### 3. The unfolding of histories of practice.

He also identifies a downside to engagement. Because by definition engagement has fairly clear boundaries, it can seem as limiting and exclusive. The upside of this is that a clearly identifiable engaged community creates the context in which the subtle business of negotiating identity can take place (p.175). However these boundaries can be limiting in terms of excluding data and experience from outside the community of practice that would inform the process of identity negotiation. Thus a certain level of porous-ness in the boundaries of multimembership is helpful.

This, it would seem, is a strong argument for inter-disciplinary working, for dialogue between obvious and not-so-obvious partners – it becomes a driver for the creation of yet more communities of practice and for a careful ‘management of boundaries’ (p. 184). This is not to say that boundaries are of themselves good or bad, but simply to recognise their potential limiting effect in the negotiation of meaning and identity in a community and the need for a managed flexibility.

The second mode of belonging identified by Wenger is that of *imagination*. He points out that imagination has a central role to play in our decoding of our experience and thus in the negotiation of meaning. Wenger uses the term imagination to denote the mode of belonging that transcends “time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves”. (p.176) He describes it as “playing scales on a piano, and envisioning a concert hall”. (p.176) There may be a sense in which imagination serves to encourage a sense of belonging which Wenger doesn’t articulate and that is in sustaining an ongoing sense of membership of temporary communities. This perhaps is best illustrated by the ongoing sense of belonging to each other shared by those who were at school together many years ago and who seldom see each other now, or indeed the sustaining throughout the year of the intense sense of belonging experienced briefly at a summer music festival or some other

annual event. It may be the imaginative journey to a place of retreat, rest and stillness made when the physical journey is not possible.

Yet as with engagement, imagination has its drawbacks. It can be very subjective and unrealistic. Wenger calls it 'disconnected and ineffective' (p. 178) For a mode of belonging sustained primarily by imagination, some origin or connection to real experience of engagement must be considered beneficial for it to be genuinely productive.

The third mode of belonging earths the second to some extent. *Alignment* still enables belonging to a community in a non-engaged sense, but with a greater sense of commitment and realism. The majority of the population align themselves with the laws of the land though they might not engage with the day-to-day community of practice that created those laws (government). Alignment is of particular interest I suggest to the Church, as it may describe those in society who claim to believe but don't want to belong. Notwithstanding the issues of non-participation that we have already examined, this mode of belonging describes the position of those who are instinctively friendly to the Christian ethos and who seek to live a 'good life' yet cannot cope with engagement with the institution of the Church. Alignment is what happens when, either by choice or necessity, engagement is not possible nor imagination adequate. Many associates of Religious Communities it could be argued align themselves to the community. They aren't actual members, but they do more than simply imagine themselves as erstwhile Religious, instead by living to a particular Rule they align themselves to that the community.

#### **4.2.4 Identification and Negotiability**

We have so far traced Wenger's argument that meaning and identity are formed socially through 'practices' that encompass both a dynamic of participation (including levels of non-participation) and reification. This involves a commitment to mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. How these are actually defined is itself open to negotiation and is

a delicate, nuanced task. We have seen the different modes that belonging can take. We must now draw all this together and explore Wenger's conclusion as to how Identity is formed as it will inform our search for the process of character formation in a virtuous Church. Wenger identifies two aspects to the formation of identity; identification and negotiability. Identification he describes as '...the process through which modes of belonging become constitutive of our identities by creating bonds, or distinctions in which we become invested' (p.191). This process is both participative and reificative, and is something both active and passive in the sense that we are agents of our own identify creation but also subject to the actions of others that help shape that identity, both in terms of 'what we are and what we are not' (p.191). This process of identification, as we have seen, is achieved through engagement, imagination and alignment.

However Wenger argues that simple belonging in one mode or combination of modes is not enough to secure identity. He says:

Identification... is not the whole story. Processes of identification define which meanings matter to us, but do not in themselves determine our ability to negotiate these meanings. (p.197)

Negotiability then,

...refers to the ability, facility, and legitimacy to contribute to, take responsibility for, and shape the meanings that matter within a social configuration. (p.197)

This Wenger describes this as an 'economy of meaning' (p.191). The process of negotiation within an economy of meaning results in what he calls the 'ownership of meaning'. This is the process whereby people through engagement, imagination and alignment negotiate and shape meaning until it is meaningful for them. Hence a decree from a super-national hierarchy



might look quite different as it is applied in a Latin-American slum or a middle-class Dublin suburb.

We have undertaken this extensive survey of Wenger's work on the social formation of meaning and identity because I believe it speaks richly to the experience of the Church as it seeks to negotiate its own identity within contemporary society. The relationship of many of the themes Wenger identifies to ecclesial discourse is self-explanatory and clear, and his work builds a superstructure around that of MacIntyre's exploration of the role of practices in forming virtuous character.

However this movement towards basing a renewed ecclesiology on Practices has its critics, none more cogent than Nicholas Healy, and it is to his insights on this subject that we must now turn.

### **4.3 A critique of Practice-based Ecclesiology**

#### ***4.3.1 Contextualisation of Practice-based ecclesiology***

Nicholas Healy has made a detailed critique of the role of Practices within what he calls the New Ecclesiology (Healy, 2003)<sup>59</sup>. He identifies much of this New Ecclesiology as having its roots in an exploration of the implications for the Church of the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Amongst the first generation of theologians to engage with this agenda he identifies post-liberals such as Lindbeck and Hauerwas (p.287). Healy suggests that the popularity of this approach has its roots in a mistrust of propositional religion. He quotes Serene Jones saying: 'when one is sanctified, one performs and is performed by the script of divine love that comes to us in Jesus Christ, a script mediated to us ecclesially.' (p.288) So in this view performance is everything – there is no faith if it is not performed – it cannot and does not exist as abstract propositions but only incarnate practices. This, Healy suggests, is in part a reclamation of a pre-modern ecclesiology (p.288)

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<sup>59</sup> Just as Patti Jung's work critiqued that of Hauerwas, Healy's role as an interlocutor is to challenge the predominance of practice-based ecclesiology in this thesis and to probe it for weaknesses.

#### Variety of Approaches to Practices

One of Healy's central criticisms of the practice-based approach is the difficulty in defining and the lack of clarity in the existing definitions of what a practice actually is. As we have seen above, both MacIntyre and Wenger take different attitudes – to this list Healy adds Bourdieu, Foucault and de Certeau, all of whom take slightly different approaches. The resulting problem is that according to Bass and Dykstra "...a practice may be 'almost any socially meaningful action.'" (p.289). What then sets particular Christian practices apart from others, if anything? Or indeed within the Christian canon of practices is there a hierarchy of effectiveness – are some practices better than others? Healy can offer no clear answer to this question because of the difficulty in defining the exact nature of a practice.

#### Loosely vs. Clearly Structured practices

What Healy does do however is to differentiate between 'clearly structured' and 'loosely structured' practices. Loosely structured practices are those like hospitality that can be interpreted and enacted in a variety of ways and in a variety of settings, whereas clearly structured practices are those like liturgy, which generally require specific procedures and contexts (p.290).

Another vitally important distinction that Healy brings to this discussion is the motivations of those who espouse the practice-based approach to ecclesiology. Essentially these fall into two camps – firstly those who believe that by enculturating the practices of the church into the ethos and mode of contemporary society the Church will be perceived as better meeting the needs of this generation. Such approaches can perhaps be best seen in aspects of the Alpha Course, Fresh Expressions and Liquid Church. Healy suggests that those who take this approach see it as part of the on-going reformation of the Church. The other camp takes a radically different view. For them fidelity to the practices of ecclesial life is what will defend the Church from the onslaughts of modernity, post-modernity and contemporary society generally – here the Church and its practices are clearly delineated against society. Healy describes this approach thus:

The church's practices will help restore what George Lindbeck has called the church's 'center', which at present 'is not holding'. The center is giving way either to liberal constructivism and group-identity theologies or to reactionary conservatism. Merely reaffirming our beliefs is not enough to deal with the problem. We must recover our traditional practices, for only they can provide us with what Greg Jones calls, 'new disciplines and practices of formation. (p. 291)

#### **4.2.2 Intention**

This leads Healy to his central criticism of the practice-based approach and his critique is similar to that that he makes elsewhere about idealised and blueprint ecclesiologies (Healy 2000)– the tension between theological modelling and lived sociological reality in the Church. For Healy the practice-based approach is far too idealised, and his analysis is penetrating.

Firstly, the practice-based approach tends to treat practices as if they were some objective reality. Indeed there is a temptation towards a mechanistic reading, not least in MacIntyre. Healy says:

Our proclamation becomes rather too much about us and what we over optimistically think we do. The message becomes rather too easily identified with an ideal account of the medium. (p.302)

For Healy 'intention' is at the heart of this issue, for it is the intention of the agent that transforms the practice from a dead rote activity to a living transforming one. He suggests that it is common for individuals or even whole communities to be fragmented to the extent that there is no consistency in what they do or say. (p. 293) Indeed he questions whether there can be a pure intention not least as he says (echoing the multimembership of Wenger) that the supposedly Christian actions of a believer are so mixed in with non-Christian influences to negate any claim to purity. (p. 293). This is a big claim and one we will review again in the light

of Bruce Reed's Oscillation Theory in the next chapter, a theory which suggests that 'symbolic' and 'work' activity can be alternated successfully and in a way that leads to growth and development for the individual involved. That said, it would be foolish not to recognise the veracity of Healy's identification of intention as a significant influence of the performance of a practice

#### Construal

Alongside consideration of intention in the performance of a practice, Healy places construal. (p. 294). Not only must agents be clear as to why they are doing something, they must also be clear as to what they think they are doing by performing a particular practice. To illustrate this Healy takes the example of the Eucharist – how do different individuals and different denominations construe what they are doing when they celebrate the Eucharist? (p.294). Are there interpretations that are to be preferred above others – can we speak of a 'normative' performance of Christianity? (p.294).

Healy asks whether an ill-intentioned or misconstrued approach to practice is simply to distort the practice or whether what in actual fact happens is that an entirely new (mutated) practice is performed (p.294). He points out that the overt practice remains the same in all these instances however 'proper' performance is achieved by only a few:

To sum up my argument thus far: practices as concretely performed are not patterns of behaviour with sufficiently fixed meanings that they can do the task required of them by this version of the new ecclesiologies. Repeated performance of behaviour patterns does not, of itself, issue in the right formation of church members nor the acquisition of Christian virtues. Character is indeed formed through practices, but only as they are performed with appropriate intentions and construals. (p.295)

### Need for Spiritual Direction

Healy's critique is pertinent and opens up another of the key proposals of this thesis – if a practice-based ecclesiology can offer a model for formation in virtue to the Church, it is now clear that a simple commitment to a regime of practices is not adequate alone. The issues of intention and construal must be addressed and so practice must be resourced with guidance and accountability. It is perhaps here that we begin to see the virtue of spiritual direction within the context of formation in a virtuous church.<sup>60</sup> Such a relationship serves to highlight issues of intention and construal and encourage a renegotiation of these in a renewed commitment to practice.

Healy's argument is compelling and moves our discussion on considerably. He warns against a mechanistic use of practice within ecclesiological debate and is always keen to emphasise the role of Grace:

Nevertheless, we have faith in the truth of the gospel in spite of our own and our congregation's faithlessness. We know we are often unattractive to those outside, sometimes for good reasons, sometimes not. But we hope that the truth of the gospel and the effectiveness of witness to it does *not* depend on what we look like or upon our being trained and disciplined and formed properly. For we know that if it did, the gospel would not be good news, at least not for us. We ordinary Christians need a theological account of 'what difference it makes' that the church and some of its practices are sometimes *really* 'unattractive' and a condition of the possibility for *not* living well. Faced with the confused and sinful practices and intentions and construals of our congregations, we need to know how the Holy Spirit, rather than being 'bound' to the church and its practices, can *overcome* the effects of the churches upon their membership, and the membership upon their churches, so that in

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<sup>60</sup> This is further developed when we examine the work of Martin Thornton in the following chapter.

spite of the church as well as by its help we may be sanctified and brought closer to Christ. (p.303)

#### **4.4 Practices as Transitional Phenomena**

So far we have surveyed in some detail the role of practice in developing virtuous character, identity and meaning through the work of MacIntyre, Wenger and Healy. This paper ends with a proposal that will be explored in more detail in the next couple of chapters, that to fully understand the role of practice in ecclesial formation we will need to turn to psycho-analytic theory and particularly the work of Donald Winnicott.

Throughout our discussion of practice there has been a tension between the externals of social constructionism of Wenger, the internal goods as described by MacIntyre, and Healy's concern for right intention and construal. So we might find ourselves asking which world practices rightly inhabit - the inner world or the outer, or perhaps a bit of both! Winnicott's answer to this question would probably be that they belong to neither, but rather that they belong to that hinterland that he identified between the two that belongs to what he described as 'transitional phenomena'. This is the same realm that sacraments belong to as do the reified objects of Wenger's situated learning - a place that is neither properly internal nor external, neither properly objective nor subjective. Such an approach discourages what Healy describes as a 'misplaced concreteness' in our attitude towards practices, yet it affirms their worth as vehicles of Grace. In this way I suggest the role of practices in the formation of both personal and ecclesial virtue can be affirmed.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter then has sought to survey the relationship between 'practices' and the formation of virtuous character. It did so by first examining the proposal of Alastair MacIntyre that virtue could only be realised by engagement with practices whereby 'goods' (particularly inner goods) would be realised that would lead to the formation of virtuous character.

The significant work of Etienne Wenger was examined in some detail to open up the richness it holds for ecclesiological discourse. The negotiated nature of both meaning and identity was noted, as was the central role of participation and reification. The necessity of a shared commitment to mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire was explored along with a more nuanced understanding of how participation and non-participation create identity.

We explored Healy's concerns for a practice-based approach not least in the lack of clear agreement between interlocutors on a clear definition of what a practice actually is, and the entirely different motivations which different people bring to this process. Healy's concern over the tension between theological modelling and sociological reality proved to be a significant argument, manifest as it was in erroneous intention and construal.

The chapter ends with a proposal that psychodynamic theory, particularly Object- Relations theory, might hold the key to a proper evaluation of the role of practice within the search for a virtuous Church. This shall be the subject of the next two chapters.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> For a fuller exploration of the role of Objects-Relations relations theory in religious practice see. Wulff, D 1997 p. 320ff

## Chapter 5: The Psychodynamics of a Virtuous Church

### 5.1 Introduction

Much ecclesiological writing suffers from a temptation towards idealism and according to Nicholas Healy this leads to a disjuncture between the theological modelling and the lived experience of the Church (Healy 2003). He identifies a twofold risk; firstly a denial of the reality of the sinfulness of the institutional Church and secondly a loss of a serious grasp of the distinctive nature of the Christian way of life as lived by its adherents. Any search for a virtuous Church must take this criticism seriously and address it comprehensively.

Alongside this stands the significant assertion made by MacIntyre in *After Virtue* that virtue is by nature relational (MacIntyre 1981). If we accept this, as the field of Virtue Ethics generally does, then two consequences of interest to our search emerge. Firstly, there is a need for theological and ecclesiological discourse to be relational, a need to do interdisciplinary theological and ecclesiological studies. If this is undertaken seriously and with integrity, such a conversation must be mutually beneficial for both interlocutors. It is not the contention of this paper that, as some fear, such a conversation between theology and other discourses particularly the social sciences is 'problematic and deadly' (Milbank in Percy, 2005 p.67), but rather vital for the rootedness of theology and ecclesiology in the lived experience of the People of God. Thus any serious search for a Virtuous Church, for a Virtue Ecclesiology, will necessitate a dialogue with other disciplines.

Secondly, as it provides a way of naming and analysing some of the hidden unconscious aspects of relationality (i.e. the lived experience of the Church) of the available potential dialogue partners, psychodynamics has much to commend it (Diamond & Adams 1999). Object Relations theory, as we will see, offers significant tools for the examination of the reality of ecclesial and, more generally, organisational life.



This chapter then seeks to examine the contribution that a dialogue with psychodynamic/object relations theory can offer the development of a virtue-based ecclesiology. It will do so by firstly setting forth the key psychodynamic principles at work in organisations generally and the Church specifically, as well as exploring the common pathologies that can develop. A more focused examination of the contribution of psychodynamics in the field of religious activity will then draw on the seminal work of Bruce Reed and others. This will not only explore the interpersonal dynamics of the Church, but also the contribution of doctrine in framing these dynamics. The chapter concludes by analysing the contribution of psychodynamics and ascetical theology in the formation of virtuous character, both individual and corporate, drawing on Freud's theory of Manifest and Latent function.

## **5.2 The Psychodynamics of Ethical (Virtuous) Organisations**

Whatever its mystical origins, the Church is never less than a human institution and as such is subject to the unconscious dynamics and drives that shape all other human institutions. Indeed, as will become apparent, it is the contention of this paper that by bringing to consciousness and working with these unconscious dynamics the full potential of religious practice may be appreciated.<sup>62</sup>

Diamond & Adams in an important paper have documented these dynamics and their pathologies, and suggested how they might be handled to create an ethical organisation (Diamond & Adams 1999).

### **5.2.1 Basic Dynamics**

Within all interpersonal relations there are two key unconscious dynamics, both of which have their sub-divisions and derivatives.

**Projection** is perhaps the best known of all unconscious interpersonal dynamics. It begins with a split in the psyche whereby (usually negative)

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<sup>62</sup> See also Gabriel, Y (1999)

aspects of the self are split off and then projected externally onto another (Diamond & Adams 1999) and (Carr 1989). Thus the external object/person becomes the focus of all an individual's internal negativity and the individual's self image is thus apparently purified and untarnished. Projection leads to individuals both seeking to avoid negative aspects of self by projecting it elsewhere, but also by trying to deal with it via the surrogacy of the person/group on which they have projected. Such projections are common in everyday life – they are the way stereotypes and prejudice are born and developed. Those in positions of leadership and power are frequent victims of the projections of others. In church settings clergy are frequently the focus of projection and become both the victims of the negative, but also the positive projections of others. An understanding of and a willingness to work with projection is a key tool in the clergy toolbox (Carr 1989).

Diamond & Adams suggest that all of this works collectively as well as individually. Groups project onto other groups as can be seen in the case of extreme nationalism; employees project onto employers and visa versa. One of the great temptations of those onto whom others are projecting is to identify with the projections and to believe those projections to be a real assessment of themselves. This is called **Projective Identification** (Diamond & Adams 1999, p. 249).

Projective Identification happens when a subject begins to build their self-image based on the projections of others. Both individually and within an institution, this has significant implications. On a national level in the UK the projected narrative is that the Church is failing and has lost much, if not all, credibility. The reality, it could be argued, despite indisputable numerical decline, is quite the opposite, and there is much evidence that the Church is rediscovering how to be Church in unexpected ways and is fulfilling its vocation impressively. The temptation of Projective Identification is to internalise the projected narrative, in this case of failure, which simply does not do justice to the reality.

Thus Splitting, Projection and Projective Identification are significant unconscious psychodynamics that impact on the reality of organisational and ecclesial life in significant ways and thus are worthy of our attention.

The second Basic Dynamic is that of **Transference**. At its most basic transference is the 'transference of prior life experience into the present' (Diamond & Adams 1999, p. 250) – previous experiences are brought into play in new, and frequently inappropriate, situations. Classically this involves those with overbearing fathers retaining a fear of and a will to please male authority figures in later life, though there are many other more nuanced experiences of transference. Within organisational life this has significant implications for relations between managers and workers, between male and female colleagues; within an ecclesial context likewise transference can impact male/female, clergy/lay relationships; indeed certain spiritual immaturity can be explained by unresolved transference onto a 'Father' God.

Alongside the dynamic of Transference goes **Counter-transference**. Counter-transference is the internal reaction of those who are the focus of the transference of others. Carr (1989) suggests that by careful examination of this the pastor can begin to develop an insight into the unconscious transactions in any situation and cites the understanding of counter-transference as a key ministerial tool. He posits the key ministerial question as 'What is happening to me?' as opposed to 'What is the matter with him?'. From this appreciation of the importance of transference Carr developed his 'consultancy' model of ministry, wherein the primary data for the pastor is his/her own internal life and his/her reactions to the situations in which he/she finds him/herself (Carr 1985). This thesis will develop this claim further – that an understanding of interpersonal countertransference is not simply essential for the ministry of individual pastors, but that it is through an understanding of 'institutional' counter-transference that the Church can best minister within the public sphere. Projection and Transference and

their related dynamics are the most basic psychodynamics in any organisational or ecclesial environment.

In their analysis of ethical organisations Diamond & Adams identify other dynamics which they claim are outworkings of these basic dynamics.

**Mirroring** is a narcissistic psychodynamic need to have one's idealised self image mirrored back to one, for example a manager may well wish to feel that they are 'the centre of an unqualified loving and devoted universe' and thus unconsciously set up a dynamic whereby employees are encouraged to idealise them and reflect this idealised image back (Diamond & Adams 1999 p. 251). Unlike the basic dynamics we have looked at, a significant level of collusion is required in this dynamic.

Likewise **Twinship** and **Merger** require significant levels of collusion.

Twinship refers to the dynamic whereby individuals within an organisation seek an uncontested unity of purpose and belief. Merger is when that desire is accentuated to preclude any discernable differences (p. 252). Diamond & Adams identify this as pathological as it renders organisational growth and development well nigh impossible. In a religious setting this can be seen in the psychology of a sect, whereby all members collude with the projective narrative of a perfect unity amongst members, where there is no room for diversity, or worse, disagreement!

The final pathology identified by Diamond & Adams is that of **Persecutory Anxiety**. Persecutory Anxiety describes the experience of workers, be they managers or employees, in organisations where there is a dissonance between a compassionate, virtuous narrative and the experienced reality of the actions of the organisation. Such 'sub-narrative' threats can take many forms such as physical violence in extreme cases, to organisational downsizing (p. 252). Workers live in a constant atmosphere of fear and threat which becomes a breeding ground for unmanaged projection, the temptation on either party to projective identification and/or a persecutory transference and thus a vicious spiral of decline ensues (p.252). Diamond &

Adams claim that such experience is widespread within organisational culture today.

How then can such an organisation contain and manage such powerful dynamics? To answer this question Diamond & Adams return to the basics of Object-Relations psychodynamics. Any functional organisation must contain an environment wherein such dynamics can be expressed and explored. A 'pseudo-morality (pseudo-ethic of caring)' must not be allowed to replace actual ethical conduct. This requires what Diamond & Adams call a 'depressive culture':

... an ethical organisation requires leaders of depressive cultures to foster integrated good and bad object relations as well as consistency between espoused ethics and ethical behavior. Depressive organisational cultures are continually engaged in acknowledging and reconciling conflicts, contradictions, inconsistencies, and splitting of object relationships, not in their suppression. The depressive organisation becomes a good enough container or holding environment in which members can engage in reparative and authentic action based on a requisite structure for authority, responsibility, and accountability. (Diamond & Adams 1999 p.261)

Any organisation that aspires to be ethical must then acknowledge and work with these powerful unconscious psychodynamic forces and provide a 'good enough' holding environment for dealing with them. This, it might be argued, is particularly necessary within an ecclesial context.

Projection and Transference and their derivatives are the basic psychodynamics that influence interpersonal and organisational life. There are however other significant psychodynamic processes that impact on the life of groups and organisations, dynamics that have yielded rich fruit when applied to the dynamics of religious practice, and to which we turn our attention to now.

### 5.2.2 Group Dynamics

The impact of unconscious psychodynamics in groups was analysed and developed by a group of British psychoanalysts in the post-war period at the Tavistock Institute in London, notable among them were Bion, Bowlby and Winnicott. In 1961 Bion published his influential *Experience in Groups* (Bion 1961). The essential premise of this was that 'any group of people in principle functioned in the same way as the individual' (Carr 1997, p. 86). From this premise Bion developed three, 'Basic Assumptions'. These identify three fundamental unconscious activities within groups and develop the fundamental dynamics explored above. Bion's Basic Assumptions have been used and developed by a number of practical and pastoral theologians, notably Wesley Carr and Bruce Reed.

These Basic Assumptions exist alongside what Bion calls the 'work group'. The Work Group is the primary task of the group whatever that may be and the Basic Assumptions are the unconscious psychodynamics that interfere with the Work Group. As such Bion saw the Basic Assumptions as pathological (de Board 1978, p. 38), whereas Carr and others are less convinced. Carr sees these Basic Assumptions as psychodynamic realities that are only pathological if unmanaged (Carr 1997, p. 88).

Bion's three Basic Assumptions are:

**Dependency:** This is where the unconscious agenda of the group is for self-preservation and the way to ensure this is through a leader (mother/parental figure) who will ensure this. Such leaders receive significant positive projections from the groups who often grant them a God-like status. The group soon becomes dysfunctional as it defers all decisions and responsibility to the leader. This is the dominant dynamic in ecclesial settings and will be examined in greater detail in the next section.

**Fight/Flight:** This too is primarily concerned with the group's self-preservation - security is achieved by either fighting or fleeing from that which threatens the group. Group behaviour will either be aggressive and petulant, or it will involve displacement activities such as avoiding the issue. Carr suggests that though Fight and Flight are opposites in daily usage they represent a unified dynamic as responses to threatening situations (Carr 1997)

**Pairing:** This is perhaps the strangest of Bion's Basic Assumptions, though as we shall see Carr develops it to offer a significant insight into the doctrine of the Incarnation. The assumption here like the others is all about self-preservation. The expectation is that the group will produce a 'pair' who will metaphorically give birth to the groups' saviour, a Messiah figure. De Board suggests that this dynamic is rooted in hope, but that that hope diminishes as soon as the longed for saviour emerges as he/she inevitably fails (de Board 1978).

All of these Basic Assumptions can be detected in the lives of groups, organisations and the Church. Unmanaged they become destructive and lead to the creation of a pathological organisational identity. This, as we have seen above, can be disguised beneath a narrative of care and compassion.

Diamond & Adams contend that the identification and articulation of the real and actual organisational identity is essential to any organisation that aspires to be ethical (Diamond & Adams 1999). Yet this is a complex task. By their very nature these dynamics are unconscious and therefore not readily accessible. Diamond & Adams suggest that they are best accessed through the stories of those working within a particular organisation. Often the information will be "...communicated metaphorically, symbolically, and through the telling of stories that evoke specific and intended thoughts and feelings on the part of the listener, the researcher, or consultant" (Stein, 1998 in Diamond & Adams, 1999, p. 253). They emphasise the importance

of the listener being able to work with projections, transference and counter-transference both personally and within the wider organisation.

In this section I have sought to identify the key psychodynamics at play in an ethical organisation, be it ecclesial or secular. Such psychodynamics cannot but impact on the ability of the organisation in question to be functional, ethical or indeed virtuous. How those psychodynamics apply specifically to the life of an ecclesial institution is the subject of the next section.

### **5.3 Dependency, Oscillation Theory and the Tasks of the Church**

#### Managed Dependency

Among the theologians who seek to apply psychodynamic theory to the life of the Church, there is a clear recognition that while all of Bion's Basic Assumptions are present, the most prevalent is that of Dependency (e.g. Carr W. 1988, 2001 and Reed B. 1978, 1996). Both Reed and Carr, unlike Bion, see dependency as a value-free term that does not necessarily need to be pathological. The key is in managing that dependency. Reed contests that dependency is a part of normal healthy life – mature interdependent living by definition requires it (Reed 1978).

Reed identifies two dependent orientations - **Intra-dependence** being those times when an individual depends on their own inner resources and **Extra-dependence** being those times when consciously or unconsciously an individual depends on that which is perceived as external to him/herself. These positions have potential to be both deeply creative, but also to be pathological. Reed's most significant claim that undergirds his whole thesis, is that healthy functional living involves a constant oscillation between these two positions. Related to these two positions of dependence is Reed's description of two primary modes of human activity, which he titles S-activity and W-activity. W-activity simply refers to normal conscious day-to-day activity in the world, whereas S-activity refers to activity that is primarily symbolic, metaphorical and internal (Reed 1978). For Reed there is a basic correlation between W-activity and Intra-dependence and



between S-activity and Extra-dependence and, as already stated, healthy living involves an oscillation between the two.

This however begs the question as to what stimulates or initiates this oscillation, what moves an individual from extra-dependence to intra-dependence, from w-activity to s-activity, how is this oscillation managed? This is important because as we have already seen that functionalism / dysfunctionalism is defined by the proper management of these psychodynamics. Reed suggests the key motivator towards extra-dependence is crisis:

Typically, the situation is one in which the individual feels he no longer has the resources to meet a new challenge, either because of the magnitude of the challenge or the depletion of his own resources... (Reed 1978, p. 34)

However in a more managed environment this regression does not wait for the stimulus of crisis, but is consciously sought by an individual seeking to build his/her inner resources or 'virtuous character'.

Reed points out that creative regression to extra-dependence allows for a smooth reintegration to intra-dependence, whereas a defensive regression makes that oscillation more difficult (pp. 35-39). Reed summarises the importance of the oscillation process, particularly the opportunity to creatively regress to a state of extra-dependence:

Our own work, in the study of groups and organisations, and the place of religious institutions in a community, suggests that every context in which the individual takes up a role constitutes for him an environment which, insofar as it is adequately 'expectable', or 'good enough', provides occasions in which he can regress to extra-dependence, and in so doing renew and reorder his construct of his relatedness to the environment. Oscillation is not therefore related

only to the maintenance of basic identity; it is the process by which the individual maintains his sense of home, workplace, community and nation as expectable environments. (Reed 1978, p. 40)

Having laid out the key elements in Reed's approach, we need now to examine the oscillation process and how it applies to religious belief in more detail.

#### Oscillation Theory

The process whereby the oscillation between intra-dependence and regression to extra-dependence is central to Reed's approach - herein lies the potential either for life in abundance or, should the process not be managed properly, limited or constricted life. For Reed this is the acid test of religion – functional religion will lead to psychological and spiritual health, whereas dysfunctional religion encourages pathology.

Reed offers six-stage model of the oscillation process that maps both its functional and dysfunctional dynamics (Reed 1978, pp. 72-95), which I summarise below.

**Stage 1: Regression to extra-dependence.** Functional religion will hold an image of God as loving and holy, a God of justice who requires and welcomes confession and penance, a God who is pleased to share the burden. Functional religion will provide images and metaphors that will encourage its adherents towards this start of creative extra-dependence.

Dysfunctional religion on the other hand does not encourage the individual to take responsibility for themselves, for their failures and distress and by failing to do so engenders a passivity in individuals in the face of difficulty. The S-activity of dysfunctional religion does not connect with the reality of the individual's day-to-day W-activity – their symbolic life does not engage with the reality of their conscious lives. Reed suggests that this leads to religious nominalism and infrequent church attendance.

**Stage 2: Mode of extra-dependence.** Having regressed to a state of extra-dependence the individual can now engage in worship, but without losing their grip on reality. S-activity is dominant but W-activity is not suppressed or split off. The individual can filter the S-activity of worship through the lens of their W-activity of reality, and thus are able to engage maturely with worship, being able to disagree with elements if necessary.

Conversely, dysfunctional religion at this stage loses all touch with the reality of W-activity, of life in the world. Not only this but:

...the individual loses his sense of distinctiveness from the worshipping group. He loses his capacity to distinguish between the symbol and the thing symbolised, and looks for immediate answers to prayer. (Reed 1978 p.76)

Reed suggests that this leads to a religious fanaticism, but also observes that it represents a common position in folk religion whereby worshippers 'fear that small changes in liturgy or ritual acts will break the spell' (p.76).

**Stage 3: Transition from extra-dependence.** The ability to re-emerge from extra-dependence is fundamental for Reed; indeed it is the key to functional religion. Dysfunctional religion/practice does bring the individual to this point, but rather traps them in what Reed calls 'ecclesiasticism'. Functional religion allows the S-activity to be integrated within the individual's total personality and enables them to re-engage with W-activity. Reed cites the Benedictine phrase 'labore est orare' as a good example of this dynamic. (p.79)

**Stage 4: Transformation to intra-dependence.** This stage can perhaps best be described as the Kingdom stage. It recognises the temporality of the Church and the teleology of the Kingdom. Reed describes the individuals realisation at this stage that '... the church does not have a monopoly over

human existence, but by his behaviour asserts that God has' (p.82). The individual realises that he is an independent human being who is ultimately responsible for his behaviour and his decisions, however there is also a realisation that those behaviours and decisions are influenced by his experiences in worship, in S-activity.

Dysfunctional religion however according to Reed never really makes it to this stage – it remains trapped within ecclesiasticism or the magic of folk religion. All that is left to do is to attempt to convert others to be like them and thus Reed states that dysfunctional religion at this stage is marked by proselytism.

**Stage 5: Intra-dependence.** Reed describes this stage with one of his more controversial statements. He states that when an individual is fully intra-dependent his/her religion '... is known in the stage by its invisibility' (p.86). Essentially this is the stage of normal human functioning. Religious practice (in extra-dependent mode) has facilitated this, but having achieved it can step out of the limelight. Reed asserts that where religion is visible at this stage it is dysfunctional. He cites civil religion as an example of this whereby a state uses religion to bolster its power and control over its people or where as church wishes to develop its profile by trumpeting its impact on a society via social justice programmes etc. This stance can only be understood in the light of Reed's assertion the religion is not something separate from human society, but something that serves society and facilitates its wellbeing (pp. 2-3). Here the goal is most clearly the values of the Kingdom operative in society and not the glorification of a separatist church.

**Stage 6: Transition from Intra-dependence.** As we saw above, there are two main motivators towards extra-dependency, firstly a conscious decision based on the recognition that a managed oscillation to extra-dependency builds inner resources in the individual, and secondly, crisis! Reed is clear - functional religion does not fear crisis, overwhelming or irrationality. It

recognises personal fragmentation as a psychic reality, but determines to manage and control it. Functional religion is not unhappy with acknowledging the need for temporary extra-dependency, for repentance and renewal. Dysfunctional religion however gets stuck in the unmanaged dependency of nominalism and folk religion or the rejection of dependency at all that is secularism.

This review of Reed's six stages of the oscillation (or managed dependency) process is significant because it demonstrates how the psychodynamics examined earlier can be acknowledged and harnessed. Psychodynamics assert that our relational dependency on others (through projection, transference etc.) is a reality both interpersonally and organisationally. Diamond & Adams asserted that any ethical (functional) organisation must provide a 'good enough' context to deal with these dynamics. Reed's model offers us a model for the individual to do so. However if our concern is for a virtuous Church, then we need to look at how these dynamics apply to the Church, and to do that we turn for a more detailed look at some of the work of Wesley Carr.

#### The Tasks of the Church

Both Reed and Carr devote significant space to analysis of the primary task of the Church. Perhaps Carr's most sustained analysis can be found in an essay published in 1988 (Carr 1988). In this he identifies the difficulties experienced within 'large impersonal groups' such as society or indeed the Church. He identifies the temptation towards 'fragmentation into small, very limited but self-determined groups', but also the psychodynamic fantasy that by pairing at least some of these fragments a unity or 'oneness' can be created (pp. 113-4). Carr here as elsewhere cautions against this unitive fantasy, as the merger implicit in it leads to loss of individual identity. For Carr this is not the same as managed dependency (p.114).

Carr, like Reed, is clear however about the reality of dependency and both see the managing of dependency as the primary task of the Church (p. 115). The primary tool for this Carr identifies as ritual. He goes further however:

The Church is not just in the business of handling dependency which sounds reasonably comfortable (if problematic); it is also an institution which deals with some of the irrationality in a society.  
(Carr 1988, p. 118)

It is in this respect that society's need of the Church is clearest. But does the church offer society this forum, this extra-dependent space wherein society can learn to manage the powerful psychodynamic forces at play? Carr is downbeat about how this plays out in reality:

I have to say, however, that I do not see many signs of the church being willing to do this deliberately or, as often hereto in more confident times, instinctively. I directly attribute the marginalizing of the Church to its own unwillingness to risk this. At the moment, in the guise of rediscovery of pristine purity, the churches are increasingly conforming to the prevailing dynamics of our society. Baptism becomes solely a joining ritual. The struggle around marriage is surrendered to expediency. The Eucharist becomes a social event - shaking hands is increasingly the focus of the rite. House churches, far from being primitive, often represent contemporary social attitudes - dinner at home with a few chosen friends. And working theology is left to the bishops, where all sub-groups project their negative aspects. They in turn see themselves falsely as a focus of unity, which is pure basic assumption behaviour. When that fails, as inevitably it must, the Church becomes a set of warring factions of the pairing type that I have just described. (Carr 1988 p.116)

Despite its frequent loss of nerve and failure to do so, Carr maintains the Church's role is in providing a 'good enough' 'holding environment' for society. Institutions do provide foci for our projections, '...they potentially provide a means of managing in a controlled fashion our inevitable regressions in the face of an imminent and threatening and incomprehensible power, such as society represents' (p.113). This is among Carr's most important insights, but the Church's task is not simply to provide a holding environment (a subject to be explored later in this thesis), but also through its own self-reflection on its experienced counter-transference in relation to society it can offer insight to that wider society.

It sometimes seems that, when in the church, otherwise sane people lose their wits. They go to the stake for unimportant trifles. The home of love and fellowship is a hotbed of bitchiness. Reason always seems to lose out to unreason. This can cause despair, until we recognise that such behaviour is not merely the product of church life and religious belief, but also a function of the external roles that church people hold in the world. In other words, the more irrationality in society is not addressed, the more likely it will emerge in chaotic fashion inside the churches. The issue then, is not so much why church people behave in so strange a fashion, but, more importantly, how this experience can be acknowledged, interpreted and used for the benefit of that society of which the church members are representing part. (p.119)

This vicarious use of self-awareness in the service of society is a fundamental dynamic of the Gospel. It represents a mature *kenosis* that doesn't seek the obliteration of self, but rather a humble offering of self in the service of others. It is in recapturing this essence that the Church can rebuild its character and become the virtuous institution that it is called to be.

We have thus far examined the psychodynamics that undergird organisational life, religious practice and the Church. In repositioning the Church as offering a holding environment to society, as well as a recognition of and willingness to work with the psychodynamic forces (particularly counter-transference) to which it is exposed, we have seen how a virtuous Church can recapture some of its essential character in offering itself for the building of the kingdom and the wellbeing of society. We now must turn directly to the Gospel to understand how the Christian narrative can shape and focus the Church in its task of handling and managing both dependency and irrationality.

### **5.3.1 Psychodynamics, Doctrine and Sacramental Theology**

The subtitle for Reed's book *The Dynamics of Religion* is 'process and movement in Christian churches' and like much of Reed's terminology it is not immediately apparent to what these terms apply. Reed explains that Process refers to the psychodynamic forces that we have hereto examined in this paper. Movement on the other hand refers to the doctrinal and narrative architecture of the Christian tradition that provides the framework in which these dynamics are rendered manageable:

...movement and process are related to each other as *container* and that which is *contained*. Movement gives form to a process; process gives life to a movement. (Reed 1978, p. 121)

In other words Christian theology gives form to psychodynamic reality, and psychodynamic process animates Christian theology. The Christian narrative then can be seen as providing a 'holding environment' or shaping context for psychodynamic reality. Such a position however raises a concern for the role particularly of the philosophical /propositional theological Tradition. It is the contention of this thesis that a dialogue between that tradition and a psychodynamic approach is mutually beneficial, though some of the territory may at first seem unfamiliar to systematic theologians.



Practical and pastoral theologians who write from a psychodynamically informed position all stress the value of illusion, however this word is used in a technical sense (Carr 1989) (Reed 1978) (Jacobs 1993). Freud famously dismissed religion as illusion, but in so doing wrote about it as delusion (Jacobs 1993, p. 8). The distinction is important. It is my contention that psychodynamic theologians who refer to the architecture of the Christian narrative as illusion are doing no more than classic theologians do when they speak about sacramentality. The 'illusion' of faith is simply 'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual Grace'. Indeed it could be argued that such an approach avoids both the traps of philosophical literalism and linguistic nihilism (see Hyman 2001). It would not alarm anyone of orthodox Trinitarian faith to understand God as a relational dynamic of love.

#### The Illusive Truth

Both Carr and Reed explore how the Christian narrative operates as a holding environment/shaping context (Reed 1978, p. 130ff) (Carr 1989).<sup>64</sup> Of the two, Carr's exploration is by far the most detailed, and again involves language unfamiliar to much theological debate. I will attempt to give a brief overview of Carr's argument because, given that we have rooted the task of a virtuous Church within the context of managing dependency and working with psychodynamic forces, we need to be clear as to how the interface between psychodynamic and traditional theological language works.

Carr sets himself to address this in his book *The Pastor as Theologian* (Carr 1989) He draws on the work of paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott as well as the psychoanalytic research of Ana-Maria Rizzuto to develop a psychodynamic language of God. The 'illusive' nature of experience he describes thus:

... that experiencing which occurs neither solely inside nor solely outside the individual, but simultaneously both inside and outside,

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<sup>64</sup> It is greatly to be regretted that few, if any, practical theologians within a UK context are continuing Reed and Carr's tradition of a serious engagement between theology and psychodynamics.

and in the integration between the two. Inner reality and external life together create a space for this to occur. (Carr 1989, p. 22)

Drawing on Winnicott, Carr recognises that this is also the territory of transitional objects. Classically transitional objects are those objects used by a child as a comforter (typically a teddy bear). The child concerned is generally deeply emotionally attached to the object and certain activities such as sleep become dependent on the proximity of the object. The object is real and yet is also invested with a significant resonance from within the child's inner life. Carr suggests that this bi-location of illusion/transitional objects should come as no shock for Christians, who after all...

...are accustomed to thinking of God as at the same moment both transcendent and immanent, both beyond and yet within. (Carr 1989 p.22)

Rizzuto's research however reveals that God cannot be simply discounted as a transitional object like any other. 'God' behaves in quite different ways, less transient and less easy to dismiss as a child would dismiss a teddy bear. Carr recognised just how challenging such language can be to traditional theological discourse, yet quotes Winnicott to emphasise the objectivity of such transitional experiences:

The transitional object is never under magical control like the internal object, nor is it outside control as the real mother is.  
(Winnicott 1951, p.237 in Carr 1989 p.24)

Carr concludes:

Although we unconsciously construct such objects simultaneously outside, inside and at the boundary of the self, there is also a bear.  
(Carr 1989, p. 24)

Thus Carr seeks to locate the God of traditional theological discourse within a psychodynamic context. He then goes on to read three 'classics' of the Christian narrative psychodynamically, the Incarnation, the Atonement and the Creation / Resurrection. Once again a brief survey of how Carr does this will reveal the potential for a mutually enhancing dialogue between theological and psychodynamic discourse without, I would suggest, compromising either.

#### Illusive Doctrine

To examine the interface between doctrine and psychodynamic theory, Carr takes the three 'classics' of the Christian narrative: the Incarnation, the Atonement and the Creation / Resurrection and seeks to understand them through the lens of Bion's three Basic Assumptions. It is a most fascinating exposition, a detailed examination of which lies outside the remit of this thesis, but a brief exploration of how he deals with one 'classic' will make the case for the richness and validity of this dialogue as a whole<sup>65</sup>.

The **Incarnation** best resonates with the basic assumption of Pairing according to Carr (p.53ff). It is all about the interactions between pairs – 'God and Jesus', 'God and the World' and 'Man and Man'. It is in these pairings that the Incarnation is experienced. Implicit however in these pairings according to Carr are notions of limitation and negotiation.

The primary limitation is that of the reality of relationality. Relationship implies our 'I' engaging with another 'Not-I' or to use Buber's terms 'I-Thou' (p. 63). What relationship also implies is the impossibility of 'oneness' or 'fusion', but this willingness to remain and retain separateness and to allow oneself to be used psychodynamically in relationship with others is a much truer understanding of kenosis according to Carr, indeed he suggests that accepting the limitations of relationship is a better translation of the concept of kenosis than much mystical language of self-emptying.

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<sup>65</sup> The work of Browning (1987) might be of significance. It is not included because it is of a depth and density that would unbalance the argument being made.

Once the limitation of relationship has been accepted then a process of negotiation can begin. Negotiation is what life is made up of and should come as a surprise to no one (p. 62). Carr identifies the negotiation between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith as having particular importance for an ongoing reflection on the Incarnation (p. 66). For the individual the negotiation between our personal identity and the roles we are called to fulfil (in the light of the projections and transferences of others) is of significance. Carr suggests that that role is not externally defined but emerges through interaction, through relationship (p. 67).

Interestingly, Carr then goes on to develop an understanding of prayer as negotiation, wherein we confront and negotiate our own projections and transference in relationship. This is undoubtedly a subject that bears further exploration, but is beyond the scope of this thesis.

This section has covered some complex material, but has sought to evidence that a dialogue between theology and psychodynamics is possible without compromising the integrity of either discipline; it might even be argued that such a dialogue actually enhances the insights of each discipline.

But what are the implications for all of this in the search of a virtuous Church? What this chapter has sought to do is to analyse the reality of organisational life, from which the Church is not exempt, and to interpret this within the framework of psychodynamic theory. It has sought to show that psychodynamic theory is not antithetical to theological discourse but rather, as demonstrated by the work of Reed and Carr, such a dialogue is mutually enhancing when viewed as process and movement, as contained and container. The work of Carr in particular has demonstrated that psychodynamic theory can indeed speak to systematic theology, demonstrating how both elements are woven together in relationship. We now however turn to the application of this in the day-to-day life of the Church, the people of God. To do this we draw on the work of Martin Thornton.

### 5.3.2 Psychodynamics, Ascetical Theology and the Virtuous Church

Thornton's work, while undoubtedly idiosyncratic, is wrongfully overlooked. A priest, theologian and distinguished spiritual director, the publication of his first book *Pastoral Theology: A Reorientation* (Thornton 1956) called for the Church to rediscover itself as a 'vicarious remnant'. It is the contention of this thesis that that call remains true today and can be expressed in the more contemporary language of Virtue Ecclesiology. Thornton's concern was for the Church to reconnect with its essential character, the giving of itself for the life of the world regardless of its numerical strength - hence 'vicarious remnant', though he was keen to stress that remnant was a spiritual/theological orientation without numerical implications. In his last book to be published during his lifetime *Spiritual Direction* (Thornton 1984) he included a chapter comparing the traditional disciplines of the spiritual life with Bruce Reed's psychodynamic theory of religion.<sup>66</sup>

Thornton recognises much common ground, despite his concern about jargon. He immediately recognises Reed's theory of oscillation which he claims is found in various guises within the spiritual tradition, namely 'periodicity' (cf. Tertullian, Origen etc.), 'consolation v. desolation' (Ignatius), aridity v. illumination, desert v. marketplace (Thornton 1984, p. 112).

Thornton also recognises the notion of dependency claiming that its acknowledgement and the recognition of its reality has much to offer the ministry of Spiritual Direction. In his own writing Thornton distinguishes between 'directees' who he describes as having contrasting 'attraits' - professional and amateur. He is keen not to value judge these, but simply to recognise their reality. Professionals need a lot of religious paraphernalia around them as they live out the spiritual life, such as icons, rosaries, badges, statues etc., whereas the amateur according to Thornton, can find

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<sup>66</sup> Thornton's role in my argument is vitally important. In many ways an archetypal ascetical theologian, his surprising engagement with the work of Reed in the penultimate chapter of *Spiritual Direction* (1984) facilitates this conversation. Here classic ascetical theology and psychodynamics engage with mutual respect in a way that reveals insights to both - in many ways a model of practical theological method!

God while doing the washing up as easily as kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament. This distinction causes him to ask whether there is correlation between 'amateur attrait' and intra-dependency (i.e. their resources are essentially inner), and between the 'professional attrait' and extra-dependency (p. 113). Certainly Thornton suggests that 'professionals' find it harder to make the transition towards intra-dependency.

Thornton suggests that the way to regulate the oscillation process ascetically is by the adoption of a Rule (or 'Regula' being the term he prefers). He cites the Benedictine Rule with its balance between work and prayer as a perfect example of the oscillation process. He is not afraid to spot weaknesses in Reed's argument when he sees them

Curiously Reed, the ultra-twentieth-century sociologist, is out of date in a way that St. Benedict is not, because he makes a clear distinction between religion, the cultus, and the rest of life. (Thornton 1984 p. 115)

He concludes

Extra-dependence-intra-dependence-S-activity-W-activity could well be translated by actual and habitual recollection. (Thornton 1984 p. 115)

Thornton finds common cause with Reed in a number of ecclesiological matters. He recognises dysfunctional religion in churches have turned into 'a private club looking for subscribers' and 'only concerned with its own survival' (p.117) Functional religion he determines is always vicarious, 'always representative; on behalf of others, of concern with the environment' (p. 117). Both Thornton and Reed, both the ascetical theologian and the psychodynamic psychologist favour communal churches over associational ones, rejecting 'ecclesiasticism.... folk religion and secularism' (p.121) Both reject numerical auditing as a measure of success

of a church and well as what Thornton describes 'shallow recruiting' that masquerades as evangelism (p. 121).

In *The Dynamics of Religion* Reed describes the role of the priest thus:

... to ensure the performance of the primary task of the local church by setting up activities which contain or render manageable the anxieties associated with the profane world. [*The priest*] does this through the following three sub-tasks:

- a) to assist worshippers and prospective worshippers to manage their regression to extra-dependence;
- b) to provide opportunities for them to worship God;
- c) to provide opportunities for them to make the transition from extra-dependence to intra-dependence. (Reed 1978, p. 169)

Thornton sees in this a deeply sacerdotal understanding of priesthood. Task a) he sees as requiring 'training and preparation in liturgical worship'; tasks b) and c) both relate to the need for 'spiritual direction which stresses habitual recollection in life, which guards against the dangers of pious introspection, and which sees prayer as a positive contribution to the redemption of the world'. (Thornton 1984, p. 119)

Manifest and Latent function – the key to the vicarious Church

It is the contention of both Reed and Thornton that whenever the Church is most itself, it is contributing to the wellbeing of the world, through the management of dependency via the oscillation process. This may or may not be done consciously. Reed borrows the terminology of 'manifest and latent function' to describe this – the Church may think it is doing one thing, yet that thing has implications well beyond those immediately intended. He describes this with a delightful analogy:

If bees could talk, and we came across them busy in a flower garden and enquired what they were doing, their reply might be: 'Gathering

nectar to make honey.’ But if we asked the gardener, he would most certainly answer: ‘They are cross-pollinating my flowers.’ In carrying out their manifest function to make food, the bees were performing a latent function of fertilising flowers. The mutual dependence of bees and flowers is an analogue of churches and society. (Reed 1978, p. 145)

Reed asserts that it is the latent function of the Church that is of primary (indeed of sole) importance and that a church that ceases to produce a latent effect, however gloriously or effectively it may perform its manifest function, has ceased to be of any real use (Reed 1978, p. 145). This leads Reed to speculate as to the primary function of the Church. He differentiates between what a Church might see as its own priorities in terms of aims and objectives and the primary task of the Church objectively and commonly held across individual church communities. This overarching task he describes as follows:

To monitor the oscillation process by containing or rendering manageable anxieties associated with the activities of the profane world so that individuals and institutions are able to carry out the tasks on which the survival and well-being of their social group depends. (Reed 1978, p. 148)

If our search is for the Church to rediscover and restore its virtuous character, then this statement is of enormous importance. Can we read this statement as a statement of theological teleology dressed up in psychodynamic language? Martin Thornton thinks we can. He cites the manifest function of the Church as ‘prayer, worship, liturgy, preaching...’ (p. 117) in other words, the offering of a place of extra-dependence; he sees the Church’s latent function as ‘the unleashing of spiritual power upon the world and ultimately the redemption of all creation’ (Thornton 1984, p. 117). For this to happen effectively, according to Thornton, two things are necessary. Firstly, individual spiritual direction for members of the



congregation, as it is the 'depth and purity of the faith of each individual member of the local body' (p.117) that enables the latent function to operate; and secondly it requires a greater literacy with regard to the symbolism of the liturgy and not its simplification or rendering accessible, which again is achieved, according to Thornton, by individual direction.

So it is in this understanding of manifest and latent function that we can begin to develop a virtuous teleology or primary task for the Church.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

A church that ignores its latent function can be considered to have lost its character. It is the contention of this paper that through a revealing of the psychodynamic underpinnings of organisational, ecclesial and even doctrinal life the Church can rediscover its vocation to that latent function. This is made possible through a dialogue between process and movement, between unconscious dynamic and sacred narrative. Such a dialogue is entirely complimentary and offers significant and important insights for the renewal of our religious traditions and a rediscovery of the primary function of the Church.

That function is discovered to be not only virtuous but clearly vicarious<sup>67</sup>, as it mirrors the example of the Gospels. Thus vicariousness will be a significant part of how the Church re-appropriates its virtuous character. Psychodynamic discourse will again be significant in this, particularly the language of 'holding environment' and the ability to recognise and work with institutional counter-transference - could it be that the current debates within the Church over sexuality and the role of women are an example of this, an example to which the Church has failed to recognise the potential for it to discuss these issues in a measured way *on behalf of* wider society?

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<sup>67</sup> For further discussion of the vicarious principle in contemporary religious practice see Davie (2007 and 2010) as well as Bruce & Voas (2010)

Having recognised the importance of this latent function, how that function is developed and deployed in the service of society will be the next step in this exploration.

## Chapter 6: Character and the Tasks of the Church

### 6.1 Introduction

Thus far this thesis has sought to diagnose the current state of the Church, particularly the Church of England, as one that lacks the confidence of character. It has sought to analyse what forces, both internal and external, might have led to the current situation and has proposed an ecclesiology based around the development of virtuous character as one possible response. I have examined the sacramental and corporate dimensions of character and holiness from theological, psychodynamic and pedagogical standpoints.

This chapter then seeks to explore how the virtuous character of the Church can be a tool in its mission and ministry. We move from ontology to ministry. Can a virtuous Church be a missional one, and how such a model relates to the more consumerist models of mission that are currently prevalent?

The key driver in developing this model of mission is Wesley Carr's assertion that it is the pastor's own inner life that yields the prime data for pastoral and theological reflection. I extend this assertion, as I have done throughout this thesis following the example of Bion, to claim what is true for an individual is also true for groups.

As we have already seen, Wesley Carr writes:

...the key question in any encounter often is not 'What is the matter with him or her?' but 'What is happening to me?' (Carr 1997, p.55)

Elsewhere he writes:

It sometimes seems that, when in the church, otherwise sane people lose their wits. They go to the stake for unimportant trifles. The home

of love and fellowship is a hotbed of bitchiness. Reason always seems to lose out to unreason. This can cause despair, until we recognise that such behaviour is not merely the product of church life and religious belief, but also a function of the external roles that church people hold in the world. In other words, the more irrationality in society is not addressed, the more likely it will emerge in chaotic fashion inside the churches. The issue then, is not so much why church people behave in so strange and fashion, but, more importantly, *how this experience can be acknowledged, interpreted and used for the benefit of that society of which the church members are representing part.* (Carr 1988, p.119)(italics, mine)

Both quotations make it clear that it is the inner life of either the pastor or the corporate body of the Church that yields the primary data for pastoral and/or missional encounter. This then is my starting point for a methodology (theology?) of mission based on an integrated and virtuous ecclesial character.

I will chart a new model for the Church's activity and as such one that is very much within the realms of 'blueprint' ecclesiology – I know of no Church that functions in this way at the present moment, though it may be that certain monastic or Religious communities at least aspire to. As we will see, it is a much more demanding and risky model than most of those currently at play, and is, at this stage, unrepentantly speculative.

I will examine the implication of the formation of virtuous character in terms of the development of practical wisdom that leads to right judgement. This is followed by an attempt to illustrate the missionary potential of virtuous character by rooting it within a ministerial theology of kenosis and an ontological eschatology.

As Carr's quotation above makes clear, the key dynamic in a virtuous or kenotic ministry is the willingness to allow oneself to be used as a tool of

ministry. By drawing on the psychodynamic work of John Rowan and Michael Jacobs, I will seek to illustrate how this might work for the Church. I conclude by exploring how an institution such as the Church can use its internal life as a tool for interpreting the wider context and what is distinctive about the way the Church can do this. Finally I will examine the whole notion of the Church as a Community of Interpretation through the work of amongst others, Wenger and Carr.

## **6.2 Character, Practical Wisdom and Right Action**

One of the problems we face when examining virtuous character is the danger of interpreting it as a form of neo-Pelagianism – somehow if we try hard enough and do the right things we will achieve sanctification. (Belcher, 2009) We have encountered this temptation earlier when we examined mechanistic readings of the sacraments. Therefore it seems appropriate to frame any discussion of the ministerial implications of virtuous character within a theology of justification by grace:

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us...  
(1 John 4.10)

It is my contention that virtuous character is also a response to the initiative of God – ministry in this sense is always reactive. This is also true of virtue - we are virtuous not in our own right or by our own achievements, but because we are enabled to participate in the virtuousness of God. The practices of the spiritual life, the use of the sacraments serves primarily to open the Church to what is already there. Thus sanctified character, virtuous character, is about being conformed to the image of Christ – and while it may encourage the faithful to be active in allowing this process to take place, it does not imply that somehow virtue or sanctification can be achieved by our their efforts.

That said, we turn to examine the implications of virtuous character for the ministry and mission of the Church. We have traced the role of practices in

facilitating the formation of a virtuous character in both individuals and organisations/institutions. A key aspect of this virtuous character is 'practical wisdom'.

Aristotle first wrote about practical wisdom, using the term '*phronesis*'. He describes it as an intellectual virtue, distinguishing it from political wisdom by its focus on the individual, whereas Aristotle sees it as both 'an intellectual and moral virtue'. (Langan, 1986) Within the literature practical wisdom is often referred to as prudence, and can be best understood as sanctified common sense. The key consequence of prudence or practical wisdom is that it leads to right action – the prudent person will act wisely. For Aristotle this was seen in acts of justice and charity, with justice representing a socialized or political virtue and charity a more intellectual and individual one. Yet before we can act justly or charitably I would suggest there is a need to develop a more fundamental attribute or virtue. Within a contemporary context Luke Bretherton, addressing the Church's engagement with the political sphere, identifies the ability to listen as a key way of forging a politics of the common good, and I would contend that this is a manifestation of practical wisdom and a fundamental attribute of the virtuous Church<sup>69</sup>. Bretherton says:

A central way in which politics of the common good is forged is the facilitation of listening to and forming relationships with those not like us and with whom we disagree. Community organising is the means by which we encounter strangers – sometimes as their guest and at other times as their host. It is thus a form of tent-making where a place is formed in which hospitality is given and received between multiple traditions. The hearing of others' interests and concerns in the context of ongoing relationship and the recognition that everyone in the tent occupies the same mutual ground fosters a

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<sup>69</sup> Bretherton is a significant contribution to my argument. His concern of a renewed contemporary public theology offers a yardstick against which to measure the proposals I am making.

sense that in each other's welfare we find our own. (Bretherton 2010 p.105)

Such a statement works on various levels for the Church. Psychodynamically what Bretherton is describing is the creation of a transitional space, a space where people individually and corporately can regress to dependency in a managed and healthy way, as described by Reed in the previous chapter. Bretherton goes on to say that it is by promoting practices that encourage listening that the Church makes its deepest contribution to what he describes as '...the possibility of politics within the *saeculum*'. (p.210) He suggests that the wisdom to listen deeply keeps the church engaged with the real rather than escaping into imagined territories:

Through listening to Scripture and others, so as to discern who is the neighbour to be loved, a sense of obedience to the Word is nurtured. Listening is a therapy for the self-love or pride that is the attempt to secure oneself outside of relationship with God and pursue illusions of self-sufficiency both in relation to God and neighbour. It inoculates the church against developing false securities because in listening one has to deal with the world as it is rather than acting on the basis of our projected fantasies or idolatrous means of escape. (Bretherton 2010, p. 214)

So not only does the practical wisdom of listening offer a virtuous church opportunities for ministry to others, it constantly builds and (re)forms the church in the process.

It is my contention that a church that has not developed a virtuous character will listen less well than one that has. For the Church to be effective in its tasks this deep listening will prove critical. Indeed such an attitude (it is more than a skill) can simply be understood as an outworking of the central commitment to prayer. It becomes clear then that it is only by engaging in the practices of prayer that the individual and the church learn how to pray.

It is through an on-going commitment to prayer at a deep level that the church will begin to develop a virtuous character and learn to listen both carefully and well.

But is the virtuous Church called to do more than simply listen well? This question is more complex than it might at first seem. We have already seen how, by simply listening deeply and encouraging others to do the same, the Church can change the terms on which our society functions. Writers on Virtue Ethics have been prolific in their recognition of the central role of teleology, and conspicuous in their unwillingness to attempt to articulate what that teleology might be. Aristotle perhaps comes closest when he describes the purpose of life as the achievement of *eudaimonia* which is generally interpreted as 'well-being'. If we were obliged to provide a biblical teleology it would probably be this:

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10.10)

or perhaps:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4.18-19)

Put more obliquely, Bruce Reed tentatively suggests that the primary task of the local church could be described thus:

To monitor the oscillation process by containing or rendering manageable anxieties associated with the activities of the profane world so that individuals and institutions are able to carry out the tasks on which the survival and well-being of their social group depends. (Reed 1978 p. 148)



It is clear that there is something paramount in the Church's task that is about optimising human and societal functioning. How this is achieved can be seen as more contentious within the church with some seeing it as a 'spiritual' and internal task while others see it clearly as a political and external task.

Ultimately this would seem to be a false dichotomy, with the Church being called to be active both in social action and in pastoral care and guidance. In the end the Church seeks to read the contemporary context through the lens of scripture while also seeking to interpret the Christian narrative to that context. This leads to an understanding of a central task of the Church as being interpretative. This should not be seen as exclusive of other tasks, but simply a significant activity within the repertoire, albeit a fundamental one. This brings us back to Bretherton's focus on the ability to listen. For the Church to be able to interpret, it must first hear clearly, and in order to hear clearly it must be practiced at listening.

### **6.3 Theological Undergirding**

#### **6.3.1 Kenosis**

If the Church is to be faithful to the character of Christ, then it will embark on this task of listening and interpretation in a particularly Christological way and central to this will be a theology of *kenosis* (Philippians 2.7).

Kenosis as a concept has suffered through a number of less than helpful interpretations and it is important that we are clear as to what we mean about it if we are fully to understand its implications for a missiology of virtuous ecclesial character.

The western tradition of the Church has generally seen kenosis as a self-emptying of God in Christ, a pouring out of Himself to the point of immolation on the cross in service of the world. This has at times been interpreted as the complete opposite of the development of character. This model of kenosis sees character and ego denied and eschewed almost to the obliteration of self. John Milbank has been powerfully and rightly critical of

this approach<sup>71</sup> as it has led to a perception of Christianity as vapid and ineffectual. Under such an interpretation it is difficult for the Church to engage with anyone or anything. It is hard to give away something you don't have!

A richer and more promising reading of kenosis can be found in the Eastern Church that sees it more as an outpouring or overflowing of God's creativity. God's kenosis is as a result of God's unbounded and abundant creativity and productivity, and the Incarnation can be seen as a manifestation of this (Tinsley, 1983). Humanity shares in this movement of God when it engages in acts of creativity, compassion and justice that are as a result of the overflowing of virtuous character.

The model of kenosis I want to offer here is not dissimilar to this. It rejects the abrogation of character, ego and self as being life-denying and affirms the development of character as a tool for the service of others. This is very important - we individually and collectively engage in practices that allow, by Grace, for the development of virtuous character (again, individually and corporately), but this is ultimately not for our own benefit but for the benefit of others and for the common good. So the model of kenosis I want to offer is one of using character in and for the service of others. In this way we can understand what it means for the Church to offer itself for the life of the world. The Church is called to develop its own distinctive character, but not for its own glorification, but rather to be used and poured out in the service of that world. Wesley Carr describes it thus:

Various criteria have been proposed to differentiate the church from the sect. In this discussion the difference appears dynamically: the church is consciously prepared to be used symbolically, and at times uncomfortably, on behalf of the society of which it is part. (Carr 1985 p.26)

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<sup>71</sup> see; <http://robbbeck.wordpress.com/2013/05/03/milbank-on-divine-passibility/>

We shall now go on and explore how this is achieved.

### 6.3.2 Eschatology

One of the ways in which the Church uses itself for the sake of society and the world is in terms of modelling for the world what a rightly ordered society might look like. It doesn't take an acute observer to notice that the Church frequently fails in this, but it is to the very dynamic of failure, confession and forgiveness to which it witnesses. This has been profoundly illustrated in the 2011-12 controversy surrounding the 'Occupy' anti-capitalist protestors camping in the environs of St. Paul's Cathedral - the Church made a catastrophic error of judgement, and yet was able to hold its hands up and confess that it got it wrong and to re-enter the debate from an entirely different standpoint. Bretherton catches this when he writes:

Faithful witness involves enabling just judgement and pointing to the coming eschatological order through acts of neighbourliness which point to the common world established in Christ's reconciliation of all things. The church is empowered by the Spirit to anticipate this eschatological order but such anticipations are not the preserve of the church: the spirit acts beyond the *ekklesia*. (Bretherton 2010 p. 214)

It should be pointed out that this 'right-ordering' of society to which the Church witnesses is never static, but always dynamic, always in constant flow, always evolving and emerging, not least because it is relational. Such a dynamic witnesses to a Trinitarian God, a God that is relational and who is caught up in the constant flow (kenosis) of love from one person to another.

Thus the Church becomes a sacrament of the Kingdom not through its perfection, but through its living by Grace. Hauerwas (1995) and other authors associated with Radical Orthodoxy (Milbank et al., 1999) have written of the Church as Polis and yet there is an inherent danger in this. If we see the Church as the City of God it ceases to have responsibilities for the

profane world in which it is set – its function become extraction and not redemption. This puts the Church into direct confrontation with the creation. I do not believe that this is the trajectory that a Church that has developed a virtuous character can or would take. But nor do I believe that the language of Polis is totally misplaced. An understanding of Church as sacrament leads to an interpretation of it as ‘micro-polis’ – the Church is a microcosm of the Kingdom. This allows for both an eschatological dimension, and also for a missional/ministerial one. The Church will detect signs of the Kingdom by looking at its own internal graced life. Again, this does not imply the absence of failure, but rather the presence of forgiveness.

### **6.3.3 Vicariousness**

A conception of the Church as micro-polis has implicit in it a commitment to vicariousness. The Virtuous Church will attempt to hold for society that which society cannot hold for itself, namely the vision of the Kingdom. The Church then as a sacramental sign of the Kingdom will be that sign by its commitment to the practices that nurture virtue and holiness firstly within itself, and then in and on behalf of the wider society. The Church will work through in itself the tensions and contradictions to be found in the wider world, but do so using practices that are formed by and inform the Christian ethic. Its commitment will be to examine and ultimately bring to a point of dynamic resolution and integration in itself those tensions and difficulties of the wider world, which its members, by virtue of their immersion in that world, experience. This can only be done however in a community committed to this task and to withstanding the pressure of the process to fragment and implode, thus the importance of the practices of forgiveness and reconciliation. Examples of the potential of this can be seen in the Church’s wrestling with the role of women in leadership, issues of inclusion and sexual orientation and indeed organisational downsizing and renewal. These are all issues that the Church faces, that individual members of Church congregations face in their daily lives, and that the non-church going public and wider society also has to wrestle with. As long as the Church simply sees these problems as issues to be resolved for its own internal

ordering I suggest it is failing in its task and vocation – when it begins to see that it is called to engage with such issues in the light of the practices and wisdom of faith *on behalf of* the wider society, and to offer whatever insights might be gained in that process back to society, then I believe the Church begins to fulfil its vocation to serve the world in God’s name. Rowan Williams articulated this task of the Church unambiguously when reflecting on the recent standoff between anti-capitalist protestors and the chapter of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London:

It has sometimes been said in recent years that the Church of England is still used by British Society as a stage on which to conduct by proxy the arguments that society itself does not know how to handle. It certainly helps to explain the obsessional interest in what the Church has to say about issues of sex and gender. It may help to explain just what has been going on around St. Paul’s Cathedral in the past fortnight. (Williams, 2011)

This vicarious function takes forward and develops the Oscillation Theory of Bruce Reed that we examined in a previous chapter. Like Reed’s theory it assumes the believer’s immersion in the world and the need to oscillate to a place of symbolic extra-dependence to maintain a personal equilibrium and insight. Where my contention differs from that of Reed is that my approach claims that this oscillation has a corporate as well as individual component. This is not to suggest in any way that a regular individual oscillation between intra-dependent ‘work’ life and extra-dependent ‘symbolic’ life isn’t important, quite the opposite – in order for the community of faith to oscillate corporately, individual members need to be able to do so individually - this is a fundamental principle of liturgy. This corporate oscillation/regression is to do with a common sacramental self-understanding.

If there is a weakness in Reed’s approach it is the focus on the individual nature of oscillation. This is simply not enough in a post-Christian society.

Reed himself acknowledges the demise of Folk (Common) Religion in an unpublished and undated paper:

It may be important to recognise that folk religion is finding different symbols as means of expression. The Christian symbols are been replaced by those taken from far Eastern religions, youth culture, and the court, to name but a few. The consequence of this is that the local church diminishes in significance within the community and it no longer provides a 'shrine' upon which people regress to dependence. Consequently members of the surrounding community become so separated from the church that the communication of the gospel becomes increasingly difficult. (Reed undated, p.17)

Within this context individual oscillation will not be enough – for the Church to speak with authority and experience requires the corporate oscillation of the whole community.

So how does this process of self-reflection actually work? Once again we are required to translate personal dynamics into corporate ones. Rowan & Jacobs (2002) give a sustained analysis of the use of self in a therapeutic environment.

## **6.4 Use of Self**

### **6.4.1 General Psychodynamics**

To understand how the Church might use its own internal life as a tool of ministry we need to revisit briefly some of the basic psychodynamic principle we explored in the previous Chapter. The two key dynamics were firstly that of projection, whereby an individual splits off and externalises elements of their psyche, 'projecting' them on to another person; the flip side of this was projective identification whereby the person onto whom things were projected starts to believe the projections to be real and therefore develops a false self-understanding. The second dynamic was that of transference, whereby behaviour that was learned or was appropriate in

one situation is transferred to another and it corollary of countertransference - the inner reaction of the 'new' focus of such behaviour. If the Church seriously wants to offer its inner life on behalf of the wider society it must take these dynamics very seriously indeed. Not only must it be aware of both the incoming data of projection and transference, but it must learn to recognise and to work with its own internal reactions of projective identification and countertransference.<sup>73</sup> Rowan & Jacobs describe the need like this:

One must never be at the mercy of one's unconscious mind. Psychoanalytic approaches have certainly been characterised as more concerned with theoretical models and technique, even if there has been recognition of the blocking effect of therapists who have not been able to work through their personal material sufficiently to be open to the patient's communications. It is this concern that initially identified what is known as countertransference, and led to the training analysis as a way of diminishing its influence in the conduct of therapy. Other aspects of psychoanalytic training sometimes resulted in unquestioning obedience certain techniques and, indeed, to a lack of training in the micro-skills of relating. (Rowan & Jacobs 2002, p.16)

Their work on the therapist's use of self in counselling and therapeutic contexts crosses different theoretical frameworks. It remains my contention that the fundamental psychodynamics in a one-to-one relationship are replicated in group/corporate relationships, and thus are transferable to the relationship between the Church and its wider society. They identified three main attitudes that we will examine in turn: Instrumental, Authentic and Interpersonal.

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<sup>73</sup> That way, disasters like the Occupy London incident at St. Paul's might be avoided!

### ***Instrumental***

According to Rowan & Jacobs (p.9ff) the instrumental use of self has its roots in the early days of psychotherapy and was the approach of Freud and Jung, though Jung was to develop a more nuanced approach over time. Essentially this approach sees countertransference (which includes the temptation towards projective identification) as an unhelpful hindrance in the therapeutic process. The therapist's primary task is to keep themselves objectively detached and not to become emotionally involved with their clients; as such they seek a clear mind or a 'tabula rasa' as Rowan & Jacobs describe it. Only by so doing can the therapist achieve the neutrality that is required to effect to necessary change in the client. In this approach boundaries are tightly held, the therapist remains firmly detached from the client and while the therapist observes the clients reactions and emotions they remain outside and separate from them. Rowan & Jacobs describe this as 'external empathy', citing Rogers' 'as if' description of empathy and his admonition that to do otherwise it to over-identify with the client. (p.12)

Ecclesiologically this approach perhaps correlates with what we might describe as a 'didactic mode' of ministry, its therapeutic corollary being Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy. Here the minister/pastor makes little or no use of his/her inner experience. The Church in this mode likewise ignores its own experience, not least its own failings and struggles, and simply preaches the Gospel as it finds it in Scripture (and Tradition). In so doing it seeks not to compromise the purity of the Gospel message with the failed attempts of its followers. It could equally be called a 'transmission' model as the clear purpose of this method is to pass on something that the Church has to someone or some group/organisation that doesn't yet possess it. The dynamics of power are also clear in this mode of exchange, the vast majority of power remaining with the 'Church' that avoids much sense of vulnerability.

We can find a similar attitude in Martin Thornton's approach to Spiritual Direction (1984). Here he describes 'love on a slab':



In practice the client is to be viewed in this double light. On the one hand he is a beloved brother in Christ, the whole person in his own right, complete human being beloved by God, of infinite value or dignity. There is a beloved brother, sitting in a chair and seeking guidance, but this can only effectively be given by placing him – metaphorically speaking – the stone cold slab, to be analysed, classified, sorted out and generally pulled pieces. He is still to be loved, but to be effective our dear Christian brother has to become a client. It is all part of the game. (Thornton 1984, p.30)

Such an approach also resonates with more conservative and fundamentalist churches that see themselves to be detached from the cultures they minister in. The task is seen simply as preaching the gospel into any given situation without needing to engage with that situation or culture.

Thornton's approach is criticised by Peter Ball (1996) who says it is incongruent with the wider Anglican tradition of spiritual direction which he describes as more like a fireside chat. This more relational use of self becomes more evident when we examine Rowan & Jacobs next category.

### ***Authentic***

The 'authentic' use of self as identified by Rowan & Jacobs takes a much more positive attitude to the therapist's response to a client. They quote a number of writers who talk up the positive use of countertransference:

Khan (1974), a colleague of Winnicott, describes countertransference as 'the clinical instrument of perception'... based on 'the conscious and total sensitivity of the analyst towards the patient'...and on the 'non-pathological capacity of the analyst's affectivity, intelligence, and imagination to comprehend the total reality of the patient'.  
(Rowan & Jacobs 2002 p.31)

This mode of relating has much looser boundaries than the instrumental approach - clinical detachment is no longer sacrosanct, but rather the therapist seek to build up a relationship with the client to get some feel for their inner world and to allow the relationship itself to be therapeutic. This requires a certain vulnerability on behalf of the therapist - a willingness to get caught up in the inner world of the client and potentially to have to share something of their own inner world with their client. The level of empathy at work in this approach is correspondingly deeper, with the therapist seeking to understand a problem from the point of view of the client, rather than as a detached professional observer. Rowan & Jacobs use words such as 'identification', 'resonance' and 'confluence' to describe this approach. Here also they assert that the personality of the therapist becomes an issue – no longer is professional competence enough, there must be a personal integrity or 'genuineness' if client and therapist are going to relate successfully. They quote Carl Jung:

We have learned to place in the foreground the personality of the doctor himself as a curative or harmful factor... The crucial thing is no longer the medical diploma, but the human quality' (Jung in Rowan & Jacobs 2002 p.59).

Rowan & Jacobs then examine this level of the use of self in a therapeutic relationship by using a phrase that occurs in many a book on Jungian archetypology and psychotherapy, and Christian pastoral care, that of the Wounded Healer. This is used within the context of a conversation as to how far a therapist can take a client. They quote Miller & Baldwin who say "creativity is constantly renewed despite, or perhaps because of, the wounded healer's vulnerability" (p.60) The challenge according to Rowan & Jacobs it that the inner healer initially projected onto the therapist by the client is slowly returned and the client is empowered to discover their own healing.

In summary then, the 'authentic' use of self in a healing or therapeutic relationship reflects a fairly classic object-relations approach. The 'healer' seeks to understand the client by reference to the healer's own internal reactions to being in relationship with the client. Rowan & Jacobs point out that some of these reactions have their origins in the projections and transferences of the client, while others are directly generated by the healer/therapist. Either way they provide useful insight that can be used for the healing/growth of either the client and/or the healer/therapist.

This approach will be familiar to many involved in pastoral care in the Church (see Jacobs 1982) and is in many ways a widely accepted model for pastoral care whether or not it is undertaken consciously or unconsciously. It also points directly to the model of ecclesial vicarious that I am exploring in this chapter. It is through the examination of internal dynamics generated by the Church's involvement with the external world that it can come to understand how it can best minister to the world, as well as on occasions coming to a better understanding of its own pathology or woundedness, or indeed both! The inner experience of the Community of Faith becomes key interpretative data.

### ***Transpersonal***

Rowan & Jacobs offer one more model of the use of self in healing/therapeutic encounters – that of the transpersonal. Unlike the instrumental model where the boundaries are firmly delineated and the authentic model where, though looser, the therapist and client remain distinct, in this model the boundaries between helper and client disappear completely, and, according to Rowan & Jacobs there is produced an almost mystical experience. They are quick to recognise the potential dangers in such an approach; however they explain it by quoting Field:

Even if you throw a rope to a drowning man, it's no help if he can't take hold of it. In certain situations it may be necessary to jump overboard and go to where he happens to be, even though the

therapist takes the risk of drowning too. In practice this means that, when a patient is in such a panic he or she can even listen, it may be necessary to abandon the defences that separated therapist and patient, to go down into the patient's desperation, and consciously share it.. (Field, 1996 in Rowan & Jacobs 2002 p.73)

Such an approach however remains ill defined and controversial even to its own practitioners – the risks of losing one's identity are manifest. Rowan & Jacobs use the term 'linking' to describe what is going on here. They describe linking as refusing to recognise separateness and assert that the closer the relationship the greater the possibility for a positive therapeutic outcome...

This can only be done in a state of subtle consciousness where the fear of relating at such a depth can be overcome or set aside or just not experienced. (Rowan & Jacobs 2002 p.82)

This level of therapeutic intervention also has spiritual overtones. Rowan & Jacobs suggest that the transpersonal therapeutic approach mirrors a 'not knowing' or apophatic attitude bordering on contemplation.

Ministerially such an approach is complicated to unpack. A not dissimilar approach would be seen in extreme forms of missionary enculturation – indeed culturally specific form of Church developed under the Fresh Expressions banner might view it as a theological reading of deep incarnation. However the same temptations remain for the individual minister as they do for Church communities that model this form of the use of self – that of losing one's identity and going native. While there is no implicit trajectory towards the loss of self/character/ego within the transpersonal, the temptation must be towards those unitive experiences that lead to a merging of identify with the 'other' that has the same effect.

What this section has sought to do is to explore how the church can use its 'self' or its character as a tool in its missionary toolkit. I've done this by following closely the dynamics in working with the self or character of the therapist within psychotherapeutic settings. There would seem to be significant levels of resonance with a theology of kenosis to suggest that this is a legitimate model of ministry and one that offers the Church access to generally untapped insights and resources.

## **6.5 Community of Interpretation**

This exploration of the use of the Church's internal experience within a missionary context begs the question as to what it does with the data that its internal reflection and self-awareness yields. To answer this we must return the notion that one of the primary tasks of the Church is interpretative. This means that the Church is challenged to interpret the experiences generated by relationship with others and to use those interpretations for the growth of the others and the church itself. Offering new and differing interpretations of reality to others changes their epistemological framework. It opens up opportunities for meaningful engagement. Thus we can begin to see that among the tasks of the Church is a commitment to evolving or negotiating new forms of meaning that are liberating and life-enhancing for others. This view enables us to see the Church as a community of interpretation.

### **6.5.1 Negotiated Meaning - Wenger<sup>77</sup>**

This process of the production of new insights and meaning is complex and dynamic. Etienne Wenger is keen to point out that meaning is never static or given, but rather negotiated:

...meaning is always the product of its negotiation, by which I mean that it exists in this process of negotiation. Meaning exists neither in us, nor in the world, but in the dynamic relationship of living in the world. (Wenger 1998 p. 54)

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<sup>77</sup> The reintroduction of Wenger's work seeks to review the preceding contentions, not least on psychodynamic theory, but also to further build my argument for the integration of this interdisciplinary model.

Nor indeed does he believe that it is limited to the big and serious questions of life:

I have argued that even routine activities like claims processing or eating in a cafeteria involve the negotiation of meaning, but that it is all the more true when we are involved in activities that we care about or that present us with challenges: when we look with wonder on a beautiful landscape, when we close a delicate deal, when we go on a special date, when we solve a difficult mystery, when we listen to a moving piece of music, when we read a good book, or when we mourn a dear friend. In such cases, the intensity of the process is obvious, but the same process is at work even if what we end up negotiating turns out to be an experience of meaninglessness. Human engagement in the world is first and foremost a process of negotiating meaning. (Wenger 1998 p.53)

How then, and why, is meaning negotiated? Wenger states that the primary need for a negotiation with regards to meaning centres on the ability of an individual or set of individuals to make a meaning their own - to gain 'ownership' of that meaning. This revolves around the level of purchase that an individual or community can get on a particular meaning or set of meanings – 'if this is true for you, in what sense might it be true for me/us?' This is the fundamental negotiation and it is the fundamental hermeneutical question for the Church in its relation to scripture, tradition and society.

Wenger goes on to talk about economies of meaning whereby "...the appropriation [of meaning] by some can entail alienation from others." (p.201). He states that implicit in the notion of economies of meaning is the recognition of a wide range of claims of meaning:

... The notion of an economy of meaning implies the plurality of perspectives that are involved in the negotiation of meaning. Having

a claim to owning the meaning of a piece of text, a knowing smile, a tool, or an idea is being able to come up with a recognisably competent interpretation of it. Such interpretation need not – in order to constitute ownership of meaning – be that of the author of the text, the producer of the smile, the builder of the tool, or the spokesperson of the idea but it must have currency within an economy of meaning where it is recognised as a legitimate contender. (Wenger 1998 p. 201)

Such an assertion has fascinating implications for the Church - to what extent can it legitimately claim to be the guardian of the faith, of scripture, of the sacraments if others can offer an interpretation that has a recognised legitimacy? To what extent can a society exclude religious discourse from the political domain, if that discourse can offer legitimate interpretations of reality? We will examine what constitutes a legitimate interpretation when we look at Wesley Carr's contribution to this debate.

Wenger suggests that part of the process of negotiating ownership of meaning is about contextualising that meaning – how does it work on the ground here? Such a question resonates with the postmodern predilection towards local individualised narrative as opposed to grand master narratives or trajectories. Yet for Wenger there is a potential tension between locally negotiated meanings and the alignment that 'requires the ability to effect the negotiation of meaning over a given social configuration.' (p.205) Again all of this offers a challenge and an opportunity for the Church – to root some of the grand sweeps of the Tradition in local experience and recognition, and to evolve a local manifestation and enculturation of Church that is responsive to the wider body. So it is with the Church's missionary engagement with the wider society – it does not have a free hand to negotiate meanings without reference to its controlling narrative. Indeed as we shall see, society expects it to be faithful to the narrative. Thus if the Church is to be a Community of Interpretation it will

need to engage its interpretations and its evolved meanings both in the marketplace of society and of perceived orthodoxy.

### **6.5.2 Interpretative Communities**

The relationship between interpretation and meaning is not limited to pedagogy but is explored in other fields as well, notably literary criticism. Stanley Fish goes so far as to say that the meaning is primarily found in the interpretation and not the black and white text.<sup>78</sup> In such an approach...

...the relationship between interpretation and text is thus reversed: interpretative strategies are not put into execution after reading: they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than as is usually assumed, arising from them. (Fish 1982 p.13)

However Fish is quick to point out that no individual interprets on his or her own. The interpretative strategies deployed by an individual are those developed by and learned from the community of which the individual interpreter is a member. Thus there is no such thing as an individual interpretation – it is always corporate or communal even if only one person is doing it.

Murley (undated) contrasts what he describes as ‘presented’ and ‘constructive’ meanings. Presented meanings are the meanings that are to be found directly within the text and which can claim a certain objectivity whereas constructive meanings are those that emerge from the encounter between reader and text over time.

Others are more critical of the concept of interpretative communities. Russell (1994) cautions against wholesale adoption of Fish’s hermeneutic approach because of its tendency towards relativism. He says:

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<sup>78</sup> The work of Stanley Fish remains critical in the understanding of communities of interpretation. No discussion of such communities would be complete without reference to it.



...let me simply note the weaknesses of this perspective regarding its problematic philosophy of language, its inconsistent treatment of the conventional basis of words and meanings, and the enormous leap that is made from legitimate interpretive impediments to epistemological dogma about perception and reality. (Russell 1994 p.512)

Cutting as this might be, Russell does not rule the concept totally out of hand; indeed he states that the need to be cognisant of the dynamics of interpretative communities is essential for those seeking to understand 'ancient and culturally distinct' text such as the Bible.

Thus we see the influence of negotiated meaning done contextually by communities of interpretation. It would seem unclear why this approach might be appropriate for an ancient text but not for a contemporary interpretation of that same text and its application to the surrounding society. Communities of Interpretation are a basic facet of human and societal functioning and therefore are not the sole preserve of the Church, however the way the Church operates as a community of interpretation had a distinctive quality about, and it is that distinctiveness that we will now explore.

### **6.5.3 Interpretation and the Priestly task**

Wesley Carr first articulated an interpretative model of ministry in his book *The Priestlike Task* (1985). He sums it up succinctly:

... his particular skill is to be able to hold apart what is being put into him from what was already there. He uses himself as a measure and his commitment is to enable those with whom he is working to understand what is happening and then to take their own authority for acting. This he does this by offering interpretations which are built upon the evidence both of what all may see and hear and of

what he experiences as happening to him. A major skill, therefore, is to be able to hold a point of reference which transcends what is immediate without becoming detached from what is happening. (Carr 1985 p.15)

Here is clear evidence of the use of self in a kenotic fashion for the well being of others. Carr is not shy in claiming a Christological precedent for this model as well as claiming it as the classic model of ministry used throughout the ages, believing that it incorporates the best of what has traditionally been understood as 'priestly ministry':

The consultancy model, therefore, may be called a model of priesthood. It is a ministry first of the church and then derivatively of each member. Its chief components are the total involvement of the church in each situation afresh; its ability to hold a transcendent reference to which people may then relate their fragmentary and incoherent experience; and its awareness that its authority is demonstrated by the accuracy of its interpretation of people's experiences in life. (p.17)

It is significant that Carr (correctly) assigns this consultancy/priestly ministry to the whole church and then only derivatively to individual members. I would make exactly the same assertion for virtuous character and this contention is central to the claims of this thesis. Virtuous character is primarily an ecclesiological quality and only then by derivation an individual one.<sup>80</sup>

Carr then offers three facets of this priesthood that are significant. Firstly it is about 'being immersed in the context' of ministry. This echoes Wenger's assertion that ownership of meaning must be negotiated locally. Here the priest is required to be present enough to pick up all the nuances and

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<sup>80</sup> At this point my central proposals for what a virtuous church might look like become apparent

subtleties of any given situation prior to seeking to offer an interpretation. This embeddedness in any given situation of ministry is the bread and butter of Anglican parish ministry and correlates clearly with Wenger's focus on participation as a key element in the creation of meaning.

However the priest-consultant cannot simply embed him or herself within a situation and hope to create a meaningful interpretation of it. The distinctive gift of the priest and indeed that of the Church is Carr's second facet, that of holding onto a transcendent reference point. Immersed as the priest maybe in any given situation their key task is to be able to set their experience within a larger frame of reference and to contextualise the experience. One of the key ways the Church and the priest can offer the wider society to get a handle on this transcendent dimension is through ritualisation (what Wenger would call 'reification').

Classically these are the rites of passage but it may be that the Church needs to be more creative in discovering how its liturgies can enable the wider society to engage with that transcendent reference point. Carr points out that there is a necessary distance required for the priest(ly Church) to achieve this. This distance is not one of dissociation, but rather a necessary distance to be able to view the whole context, transcendent and local.

Carr's third facet is perhaps the most important within the context of the Church as Community of Interpretation and it is that of the Church/priest offering self-authenticating interpretation. For an interpretation to be of any use it must be not only offered but also received. Carr says:

The church's gospel is commended in so far as it interprets human life in such a way that the interpretation resonates with experience and therefore may be accepted or rejected, but it cannot be ignored.  
(p.22-23)

He goes on to explore the exercise of this interpretative ministry within the prevailing culture of dependency within churches that we examined in the last chapter. The first great temptation that Carr recognises is the projective identification that says the Church can deal with and handle all the unrealistic and irrational demands made upon it. This turns the Church's self-perception into that of a 'welfare body' and demotivates its ministers.

The second difficulty we have explored briefly above is the tension between being embedded and participative in a particular situation and the need to remain detached and distinct. The challenge, according to Carr, is to find ways of expressing the distinctive nature of the Gospel within the contemporary context.

The third difficulty Carr identifies is a very prescient one in some areas of the contemporary Church and it is the question as to how the Church serves the wider society. He identifies within society an expectation that the Church will handle peoples' 'basic dependent needs' competently. Failure to do this either on account of an unwillingness to engage with the unchurched, or through simple incompetence compromises the Church's witness and it fails in its primary task.

Carr ends his exploration of the interpretative orientation of ministry where we began with a recognition of the need for ministerial (ecclesial) integrity...

To speak of integrity, therefore, is not to suggest that he might be right in every decision that he takes or that his motives are somehow more pure than those of others. Integrity is an applied idea. To possess it is as a matter of policy to invite personal examination of decisions and interpretations to see how coherent they are. (Carr 1985 p.35)

Such a statement when applied to the whole ecclesial body encapsulates the role of the Church, formed by virtuous character acting as a community of

interpretation, and how the development of that character is fundamental to the task of the Church.

## Chapter 7: From Virtue to Holiness

### 7.1 Towards Holiness

#### 7.1.1 Review of the Argument so far

This thesis has sought to explore the formation of ecclesial character and before we can draw any clear conclusions from it it might be helpful to review the argument briefly. My opening contention was that the notion of character is currently being undermined by short term-ist strategies for growth within the church many of which are rooted in a value system parasitic of, if not unapologetically embracing of, what Richard Sennett calls the New Capitalism. Such a strategy seeks not the resurrection of the Church within a post-Christendom era, but rather the resuscitation of its numerical strength and the recapturing of past positions of power and influence. It has been my contention that this growth model has failed not only the Church but wider society as well as is evidenced in the financial, political/democratic and social crises that Great Britain finds itself in at the beginning of the second decade of the second millennium AD. What's more I would suggest that such an approach risks fundamentally damaging the integrity of the Church by drawing its focus away from its primary tasks. In the final analysis the Gospel simply does not lend itself to numerical and statistical auditing – it is time to start measuring what is valuable rather than simply valuing what is measurable. The quantitative must not be valued at the expense of the qualitative.

A key tool in examining this situation has been MacIntyre's critique of contemporary moral discourse in *After Virtue* (MacIntyre, 1981). MacIntyre's contention is that moral discourse in post-enlightenment societies has essentially been so corrupted as to be dysfunctional at best and non-existent at worse. For MacIntyre only the embracing of an ethic of virtue will rectify this.

To further amplify this analysis the work of Erich Fromm was explored. Fromm posits that we are essentially afraid of freedom and seek ways of

avoiding it through authoritarianism, destructiveness and/or automaton conformity. Of equal importance to the argument was Fromm's contrasting of two different types of orientation in society - the acquisitive and the ontological. This provided clear resonances with the New Capitalist / consumerist models critiqued by Richard Sennett et al (Sennett, 1998). Having made such a diagnosis we explored how a right relationship between the Church and its surrounding culture and society might be achieved. A brief review of Niebuhr's Christ and Culture led to a more detailed examination of the field of Virtue Ethics and its implications for the formation of character.

A detailed examination of two key elements of Virtue Ethics, those of Narrative and Community was then undertaken. These were examined in an overtly ecclesiological and theological context, leading to the conclusion that Virtue Ethics point to a fundamentally sacramental understanding of the function of the Church. Narrative and Community come together in the embodied performance of that narrative, in liturgy, first and foremost the Eucharistic liturgy. This approach, it was noted, rejects both the foundationalism of biblical literalism and individual experience. If the Church is constructed sacramentally then it follows that its primary function is that of a sacrament – a claim that can be understood through an understanding of the concepts of mediation and agency. Such sacramental formation and agency means that the people collectively and individually who are subject to it and who perform it are, within the tradition, to be considered sanctified – its effect will be that of the sanctification of character. But as Patti Jung reminds us that sanctification must not simply be limited to cognitive aspects of our personalities, but embrace the affective and unconscious aspects as well. A key way by which this can be achieved is by a commitment to 'practices'.

Practices are a central part of the vocabulary of Virtue Ethics and have also taken on a technical role within the pedagogy of Communities of Practice. Key to MacIntyre's understanding of a Practice is its yielding of what he

describes as internal and external goods – a theme to which we shall return. The role of Practices within educational pedagogy, particularly that developed by Etienne Wenger, yields data of significance to our argument. Practices facilitate the negotiation of meaning and they do so by encouraging participation and reification. Wenger also identifies the three primary aspects of any community committed to a certain practice, those of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. The negotiation of meaning leads to an understanding of self and identity, as this too is a negotiated concept animated by a dynamic of participation and/or non-participation and an engagement with different modes of belonging. All of this is very well, but open to the charge of theoretical idealism. Nicholas Healy reminds us that any theology based around practices is not self-explanatory and needs to take very seriously the complex notions of intention and construal in the agent.

Practices as understood in this context have many of the characteristics of what would, in psychodynamic discourse, be considered as transitional phenomena. Psychodynamics offer significant insight to reclaiming an ethic of virtuous character, not least through their naming and hence making accessible the hidden dynamics of relationships between individuals and also within organisations. Bion's analysis of group dynamics is particularly helpful and within an ecclesial context the issue of dependency is clear. Bruce Reed's suggestion that maturity requires a 'managed dependency' again offers much to an exploration of an ethic of virtue. Reed's identifying of an oscillation between intra-dependency and extra-dependency finds, through the work of Martin Thornton, a resonance within the ascetical tradition of the Church, namely that of habitual and actual recollection. The function of the Church then, in psychodynamic terms, becomes its ability to offer the wider society a means of managing its dependence and the doctrine of the Church provides a container wherein this can happen safely and appropriately. However, the management of dependency (and irrationality) is not overtly what most churches see themselves as being about. This is not a problem for Reed as he develops the Freudian contrast



of manifest and latent function - while the Church's manifest function is to worship God within the mythic structures of Christian faith and doctrine, its latent function is to manage dependency which that manifest function enables it to do.

The last part of my argument to this point explored how this plays out in the life of the Church and how it might lead to the formation of a virtuous ecclesial character. My contention is that this approach allows for a reappropriation of kenosis. Kenosis in this context involves the use of self not for self-gain, but for the benefit of others – self is orientated to the service of others, rather than being obliterated as is sometimes the understanding of kenosis. Thus the Church uses itself and its internal dynamics for the benefit of and on behalf of the world. Thus the virtuous Church is a kenotic Church, it is a sacrament of the Kingdom, a micro-polis, a brief foretaste of the Kingdom to which it witnesses and to which creation ultimately journeys.

The notion of the Church using itself for the benefit of and on behalf of the wider society and world has within it an implication of vicariousness – the virtuous Church will by definition be a vicarious Church and that vicariousness will be acted out through the Church's engagement with the wider society and the relationships it forms. This will then allow the Church to begin the process of negotiating meaning (which is central to its mission) through those relationships. Thus the Church becomes a community of interpretation, interpreting its experience and the experience of the world through the practices of embodied kenotic discipleship.

#### **7.1.2 Priority of Inner Goods over External Goods**

So what are the implications of such an argument, how does such a hypothesised remedy address the original diagnosis of corroded character made in the opening chapter? Perhaps the most striking and far-reaching claim I would suggest is MacIntyre's demand for the priority of inner goods over external goods. Much of my diagnosis of the current ecclesial pathology

is centred on consumerist and neo-capitalist models of growth. Such growth in MacIntyre's terms is to be understood as 'external goods'. The contemporary Church, in its indiscriminate or even collusive embracing of the New Capitalist / consumerist paradigm runs the risk of privileging external over internal goods. The Church Growth movement is focussed almost exclusively on external goods and even when it apparently focuses on qualitative inner goods, it is as often as not a means to an end to achieve those external results it so hungers after.

### ***7.1.3 Growth as a by-product of Ontology***

It is worth stating here again that growth in and of itself is neither good nor bad. The aim of this argument is not to undermine or undervalue church growth, but simply to suggest that that growth will ultimately be short lived and corrosive if it is not primarily focused in the achievement of inner goods. Put simply, genuine church growth, should it occur is ultimately a product of ecclesial ontology. This echoes Fromm's preferencing of the ontological orientation over the acquisitive. Notwithstanding the concerns voiced by Healy, a practice-based approach to discipleship potentially undermines the acquisitive foundationalism of both biblical literalism and personal experience. Practices at their best project us into a 'quest' orientation, an on-going search for an on-going revelation that is never completed, one that is open to the continued reception of inner goods regardless of the external success.

This however cannot happen without understanding the way faith works – the fish must become aware of the nature of the water in which it swims and it may well be that that many of the problems that an attempt to rebuild ecclesial character face can be traced back to a lack of understanding of the meta-context in which faith traditions function. This is why I believe an engagement with psychodynamic and more broadly psychoanalytic discourse is of such value. Such an engagement reveals sacramentality as the key threshold concept in religious discourse along with symbol and metaphor. To make an even bolder claim, I do not believe that a non-

sacramental approach to faith can ultimately facilitate the development of a virtuous ecclesial character. It is the dynamic of sacramentality, when set over and against the foundationalism of biblical literalism and personal experience that allows the questing orientation to flourish. That said, caution needs to be expressed about the cognitive dissonance of a sacramental literalism that afflicts certain sections of the Church.

### **7.1.3 Holiness and Virtue**

#### ***Religious Orientation***

The question of orientation is significant and maps neatly onto MacIntyre's concern for teleology within a Virtue ethic. A number of the early writers in the Psychology of Religion, notably Allport & Ross, did some empirical studies on religious orientation – what is the driving force in making people religious and how does it correlate with other social attitudes?<sup>82</sup> Allport & Ross came up with two key orientations - 'extrinsic' and 'intrinsic'. Those people whose religious orientation can be said to be extrinsic are those who:

....are disposed to use religion for their own ends. The term is borrowed from axiology, to designate an interest that is held because it serves other, more ultimate interests. Extrinsic values are always instrumental and utilitarian. Persons with this orientation find religion useful in a variety of ways to provide security and solace, sociability and distraction, status and self-justification. The embraced creed is lightly held or else selectively shaped to fit more primary needs. In theological terms extrinsic type turns to God but without turning away from self. (Allport & Ross 1967 in Wulff 1997 p.232)

Essentially religious faith in this context can be seen as a means to an end. However those whose religious orientation can be said to be intrinsic are those who:

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<sup>82</sup> Allport & Ross and Batson's work explore the essence of religiosity and how it is expressed. It maps neatly onto Reed's notion of functional and dysfunctional religion. Here it reveals a motivational analysis for religiosity that impacts the formation of character.

... find their master motive religion. Other needs, strong as they may be, are regarded as of less significance, and they are, so far as possible, put into harmony with the religious beliefs and prescriptions. Having embraced a creed the individual endeavours to internalise it and follow it fully. It is in this sense that he lives his religion. (Allport & Ross (1967) in Wulff 1997 p.232)

The intrinsic orientation then, unlike the extrinsic does not see religious practice as a means to an end, but rather as an end in itself.

Such an analysis offers much food for thought – how does it correlate with utilitarian and deontological ethical motivations that we examined earlier? It would also be an interesting exercise to map these orientations onto Reed's oscillation model, though this is beyond the scope of this paper. Might it be that extrinsic and intrinsic motivations are stuck at particular points on the oscillation sequence? And how might this work organisationally and institutionally? More fundamentally, does intrinsic motivation map neatly onto MacIntyre's inner goods concept?

Based on the evidence of this paper so far I think we can conclude that it doesn't. Religion as an end in itself may well map onto literalist approaches to scripture and the language of faith, but the sacramental model, so central to the argument of this thesis, does not stop with that language, it points beyond it seeing it as a transitional space created for the exploration of a greater truth - the narrative of faith is recognised merely as a sacrament of a deeper reality. So if we are to seek an understanding of MacIntyre's inner goods we will have to go further than an intrinsic model of religious belief.

However another psychologist of religion, Daniel Batson, felt Allport & Ross's typology to be too limited and posited a third orientation. That of Quest (Wulff 1997 p. 238). Quest orientation is essentially that religious orientation that endlessly seeks a truth that it realises it will never fully comprehend - this is the orientation of the spiritual explorer who commits

to the inner search for the divine, never willing to accept easy dogmatisms and forever pushing down into deeper and deeper truths. It is the spirituality of the journey rather than the destination,<sup>83</sup> and has much in common with Fowler's Stage 6 - 'universalising faith'. (Fowler 1987)

It is thus my contention that MacIntyre's concept of inner goods is really only fully expressed in a quest orientation, both personally and organisationally, and thus true ecclesial character will, while recognising their reality, ultimately reject both extrinsic and even intrinsic orientations and in their place always have at its centre this questing motivation.

#### **7.1.4 From Virtue to Holiness**

One of the characteristics of a quest orientation is the ability to engage with and integrate new experiences and understandings (positive and negative), to process them, and to make them one's own. This notion of integration, and its close concept individuation, is key I believe to what we can learn from this study. The Church is called, through a quest orientation, to become integrated and integrating. As the Church works towards its own integration, so it enables the integration of its members and the wider society in which it is situated through the oscillation process we examined earlier. It is ultimately the engagement with this process that defines the Church and gives it its character.

This enables us to move from a primary metaphor of virtue to one of holiness, and thus embed this argument more clearly in Christian discourse. Holiness at its core is about integrating the life of God within the life of the believer and within the community of faith. It is erroneous to read MacIntyre's espousal of a virtue ethic purely in individualistic terms not least as this would be a product of the very modernity he seeks to critique so vigorously. Much of MacIntyre's political philosophy is a critique of capitalist bureaucracy and this has been engaged with systematically by a number of

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<sup>83</sup> As an aside, Bateson sought to correlate the three different orientations with prejudice. Those subjects of Quest orientation were shown to be less predisposed to prejudice than those of extrinsic or intrinsic orientations.

writers in organisational sciences (Beadle, 2006). Beadle & Moore attempt to summarize this paper thus:

All identify relevant internal goods with the ambition of establishing these as a warrant for awarding their profession the status of a practice. The problem with this, however... is that the establishment of internal goods is a necessary but insufficient condition for the identification of a practice — the neglected conditions being around the role of the practice in the narrative of an individual's life, the tradition of the community to which individuals belong and the interconnected role of institutions. (Beadle & Moore p.335)

This is a significant critique in terms of our search for institutional and ecclesial virtue or holiness. It clearly preferences inner goods to external within an organisational context as well as an individual, and flags up the importance of practices, tradition and the engagement of communities (of practice). From this we can begin to deduce a theology of ecclesial holiness. As we have seen repeatedly this will focus on the production of inner not external goods, formed by a commitment to practices that are an embodiment of a living tradition, and that seeks a relationship of engagement with other communities in the wider social context.

It is an integration of these elements that will drive the individuation of the Church and thus define its mission in the world. Ecclesial fragmentation compromises real mission, not least because as we have seen the Church's primary mission is one of integration. This doesn't preclude a theology of the wounded healer, but simply calls for us to integrate our woundedness that it may be transformed into holiness.

#### **7.1.5 Mission as the Cultivation of Holiness, Wisdom and Right Action**

Is it possible then to identify these inner goods that are the products of ecclesial virtue? Characteristically there are three that are key, holiness, wisdom and orthopraxis (or right action).

### ***Holiness***

Holiness we have already defined in terms of integrating the life of God within the life of the individual disciple and the community of faith.

Holiness, theologically, has its origins in the nature of the Divine and thus it becomes, by derivation and through relationship, a characteristic of those who seek to integrate the Divine into their lives – both individuals and communities of faith. John Rogerson points to the traditional contrast between holiness and profanity (Rogerson, 2003) . While the term profanity has taken on seriously pejorative connotations, it is possible to see holiness as standing against a secular modernity that has been evacuated of any sense of the Divine. As we have seen one of the central consequences of secular modernity identified by MacIntyre and also Sennett is its proclivity towards fragmentation.

Holiness might be also be defined as the cultivation of the right kind of eyes through which to see the world, in essence the education of conscience - for Hauerwas holiness is the training to see/know what shapes our view of reality. Training in holiness is frequently correlated in the classical literature of the spiritual life with the practice of prayer, both private and liturgical, and while this practice is undoubtedly fundamental I would want to argue that all of the disciplines, all of the practices of the Christian life, lead to the formation and development of holiness. Holiness may well be an interior virtue, but it is a relational and social one as well. We can then see that there is a relationship between the inner goods or virtues of holiness, wisdom and orthopraxis – they are related to each other in a manner not dissimilar to the doctrine of the Trinity. Ultimately they are of one substance and inseparable - the person who is holy will also be wise and act in the right way, and likewise the person who acts in the right way will be holy and wise.

Within the context of ecclesial character Douglas Davies offers a definition of holiness that is of interest:

...holiness is the value attributed to a focal source of identity that furnishes the moral meaning of life for members of a social group in a process that transcends ordinary levels of experience. (Davies 2003 p.50)

Davies suggests that a sociological analysis of holiness as part of what makes up religious identity can reveal ‘...the dynamism experienced by individuals and groups when the ordinariness of life is transformed by a higher-order power.’ (p.66). How are we to understand this ‘higher-order power’ and transcendence within the context of this interdisciplinary exploration? This question need not be as difficult or controversial as it might at first seem. It might simply point to the integration of our God-given unconscious, collective unconscious and that primordial energy that faith traditions name the Divine. Thus holiness is possible without recourse to what is commonly called ‘the supernatural’, though it may involve the integration of that which transcends the natural, the ‘a-natural’.

Davies goes on to speculate as to whether a new form of purity laws may be emerging with their origins in the New Age movement.<sup>85</sup> These laws he suggests might have a scientific basis and involve the avoidance of genetically modified food for example (p.67). Thus a discipline of sustainable and ecologically aware living might emerge as a new form of Christian orthopraxis and a new holiness code.

### ***Wisdom***

Wisdom is often described as ‘sanctified common sense’, the common sense of one who is holy. As we have seen Aristotle identifies the importance of ‘phronesis’ or practical wisdom and contrasts it with political wisdom, as the focus of practical wisdom is the individual and not the polis. He also contrasts it with scientific wisdom which is more concerned with universals as opposed to particulars which are the locus of phronesis (Langhan 1986).

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<sup>85</sup> See also Carr (1991)



For the purpose of this discussion such a distinction is not necessary. Wisdom broadly understood is that inner intuition that is the product of holiness and right action. It can be considered as closely related to discernment and the ability to respond appropriately to and given situation, be it personal, political or even scientific. The later claim might raise some eyebrows, but wisdom is clearly distinguishable from knowledge. Within the scientific domain wisdom can be understood as ‘understanding of’ in contrast with ‘knowledge about’. Wisdom has at its core experience filtered through the lens of thought and reflection. It has an integrity and coherence about it that speaks of an individual or organisation that is integrated and integrating.

### ***Orthopraxis***

Orthopraxis is the application in daily living of holiness and wisdom. Like wisdom it has at its core an integrity and cohesiveness that is the product of an integrated life, the consequences of which are integrative for others. Like wisdom, orthopraxis transcends the personal, political and scientific. We examined Bruce Reed’s claim earlier in this thesis, that the summit of intra-dependency for the Christian was a life of hidden service in the world, and as we now examine orthopraxis we can begin to see how this might be. Orthopraxis seeks not the external goods of reward, be it financial or reputational, but simply to live out an integrated faith within the context of secular society, for the benefit of that society.

## **7.2 Implications**

Such considerations move us a long way from the New Capitalist models on which much of the current fad of Church Growth is predicated. I have suggested that the primary character of the Church is that of an integrated and integrating institution (or more correctly ‘institution-in-the-mind<sup>86</sup>’). Such an institution has at its core the virtues of holiness, wisdom and orthopraxis, as these are the inner goods that are produced by engagement with the practice of faith. My contention then is that if the primary

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<sup>86</sup> see Carr 1997

characteristic of the Church is that it is integrated and integrating, then it should seek only the inner goods of holiness, wisdom and orthopraxis. I would contend that, far from being missional suicide, this would actually liberate the Church to have the confidence to be itself and fulfil its God-given function within society without the baggage of anxiety about its own survival and relative position of power and influence in that society. Of course there are administrative challenges to be grasped in reshaping the Church for a new context, in moving from modernity to postmodernity, from colonialist to post-colonialist, from Christendom to post-Christendom, but that is what they are - administrative challenges. The character and the tasks of the Church remain the same. However the attraction of power and influence to the Church at the expense of its mission is not new either.

#### **7.2.1 Change of Metaphor - Church as Learning Community**

In order to facilitate a movement away from concern with external goods towards internal goods it is necessary to change the primary metaphor for contemporary church life from a commercial/consumerist one to an educational/pedagogical one. It is my contention that the metaphor of church growth needs to be replaced by one of the church as learning organisation. This is not a particularly new metaphor and has been in use in both secular organisational and ecclesial circles for some time, but has been in recent years eclipsed by that of growth. How might this help the formation of ecclesial character? Besides the oft-repeated focus on the internal goods, I believe that such a metaphor is fundamentally a truer reflection of the teleology of the Church. We identified in the previous chapter one of the tasks of the Church as being a community of interpretation, involving a negotiation of meaning. This engagement is both internal to the community of faith as it seeks to negotiate its meaning and identity with the inherited tradition but also external as it seeks to embed that identity in the wider world. This task is in essence a task of learning, not least learning about limitations<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> See Carr (1989) on the psychodynamics of the Incarnation

So the process of negotiation of meaning, both internal and external to the Church, ultimately becomes one of negotiation of identity, and that negotiation itself becomes constitutive of identity – it is in the process of negotiation of identity that identity is formed.

But is this not true for every organisation – what makes the Church distinctive? To some extent it is true of certain other organisations; however we need to recognize that many organisations are not primarily constructed to negotiate meaning or identity. Where secular organisations do seek to negotiate meaning and identity it is a secondary or even tertiary task, frequently as a knee-jerk response to a crisis, or as a means to increase profitability and the production of external goods. One of the things that marks out the Church (and other faith communities) as different is that at a profound level their primary function is about the negotiation of meaning and identity, though this can often be lost at surface level in the light of biblical and doctrinal literalism and fundamentalism.

The other thing that marks the Church as distinctive is its particular inheritance of tradition and repertoire of practices. We saw earlier that MacIntyre defined a tradition as “... an historically extended, socially embodied argument...” (MacIntyre 1981 p.222) and as such, no tradition is ever static. One of the challenges of the community of faith is to learn how to develop that tradition in its time and place – what is an appropriate and what is an inappropriate development in the tradition. This again is a learning task and not one of acquisitiveness.

A further distinctive factor in a reclaimed metaphor of learning is the nature of that learning. The learning offered by a learning Church can never be solely cognitive. The learning to which membership of the community of faith calls us is cognitive and affective, conscious and unconscious. Through engagement with symbolic and sacramental practices the learning proffered by faith is transformational personally and socially, because as we have seen it is orientated towards personal and social integration – hence the fact that

this learning is designated as formation. What is formed and re-formed is our character, both individually and corporately, and as we have seen this learning, this formation is never the sole preserve of those who have experienced it – by its very nature it seeks to be shared widely through the orthopraxis of disciples in the daily tasks of life - by its very nature integration seeks to integrate everything around it.

Yet again it should be stressed that the change of operational metaphor from growth, which despite its apparent openness to a breadth of interpretation as we have seen in almost exclusively orientated to numerical growth, to one of learning does not preclude significant numerical growth – indeed I would suggest that such a Church with a new humility and openness to negotiate meaning and identity with individuals and the society around might become more attractive to others. This however is no longer a first order goal, but rather a consequence of a commitment to inner goods.

So if we accept the need to change the metaphor from (numerical) growth to learning that this exploration has highlighted, then we need to explore some of the implications that this might have for the life of the Church.

#### **7.2.2 Sacramental Practices - the creation of distinctive transitional spaces**

If the prevailing metaphor for church life is to change from one of growth to one of learning, then a primary concern will be the creation of a context, what Etienne Wenger calls ‘an architecture for learning’ (Wenger, 1998). This study has already claimed that in psychodynamic terms the primary function of the Church within society is that of managing dependency and this is done through a consciously managed dynamic of oscillation between states of intra- and extra- dependency. The state of extra-dependency is facilitated by the provision of symbolic/metaphorical material in the form of a practice. This, it should be noted, is not the sole preserve of the religiously minded; indeed it is a basic human need and is a fundamental part of daily life and the cultural formation of our society.

Richard Sennett (2012) and James K A Smith (2009) have written significant analyses of the liturgy of daily life. Smith identifies three particular loci (amongst many) that illustrate this secular liturgy - for example, the shopping mall (p.93ff). Smith identifies the emergence of themes primarily considered as religious within this context. He suggests that shopping serves a function that promises healing, indeed consumerism is predicated on the notion that if you are missing something, you will be able to buy it – there is nothing that you might want that you can't buy, and this increasingly points to lifestyle as opposed to particular objects. Healing will come when you too become like the beautiful people in the advertisements (p.96).

Smith recognises that consumerism/shopping is increasingly the predominant social activity in many people's lives. The trip to the mall, the coffee with a few friends in between purchases provides community within a social context where other forms of community are being seriously eroded. Indeed for Sennett the recapturing of social liturgy is the key to the recovery of community (p.250ff). Indeed it is membership of the community of shoppers that increasingly gives meaning to people's lives. Here we see less a managed negotiation of meaning and identity, but rather a desperate capitulation to the dominant social trend. Smith ends this analysis with a wry suggestion what marketing is a form of secular evangelism (p.102).

Smith provides similar analyses of what he calls the liturgy of 'sacrificial violence: the military-entertainment complex' and later 'cathedrals of learning: liturgies of the university' (where he describes a much more consumerist approach to knowledge acquisition than the one being explored here). Underlying his analysis is the suggestion that while liturgy is an intrinsic human need and the church has no monopoly on it, the liturgies of the secular world may have implicit religious undertones, however they are orientated towards an acquisitive as opposed to an ontological telos.

### ***Christian Liturgy***

What distinguishes Christian liturgy is ultimately its teleology. Christian faith offers a narrative and a worldview that contrast with and challenge the predominance of secular modernism. Thus Christian liturgy, broadly understood, becomes the key to the formation of an ecclesial character rooted in a metaphor of learning for ontological and not acquisitive ends.

In chapter 3 of this thesis I undertook an analysis of how a Christian ethic and worldview are rooted in the embedded practice of the primary Christian narrative that of the Eucharist. This analysis drew on the work of Hauerwas & Wells (2004) and Davidson & Milbank (2010) though it could just have easily drawn on Smith's subsequent analysis of Christian liturgy and its potential to form a distinctive worldview. It is not my intention to repeat such an analysis here, but rather to suggest that all aspects of Christian life have a liturgical quality and have the characteristics of transitional phenomena. Thus Christian life differs from secular life not because it has a liturgy and worships, not because it undertakes particular practices that have a transitional character, but because of the narrative and tradition that shapes and forms that liturgy, practices and transitional relationships.

To say that the liturgy of Christian life is broader than merely corporate worship is not to demean corporate worship. Fundamental to a renewal of ecclesial character is the renewal of corporate worship and the personal prayer that is ultimately a part of it. This will have at its heart the transitional process whereby the life of the Divine can be integrated within the life of the community and the individual, and from this as we have seen will be produced holiness, wisdom and orthopraxis.

The Eucharistic liturgy contains not only practices of incorporation and integration, but within what the Church of England calls 'the liturgy of the Word' an attempt to understand scripture and the revelation, will and action of God. Thus any broader liturgy of Christian life will contain an element of theological reflection. The purpose of this is primarily to ponder the nature

of the Divine. Graham, Walton & Ward (2012) have sought to redefine what this might look like both in repertoire and purpose. They identify seven key places of encounter and thus stimuli for reflection:

1. The personal inner experience of the individual
2. Alternative narratives to that of scripture, but that can be woven into the narrative of scripture – the stories of people's lives etc.
3. The canonical narrative of scripture
4. Communal theological reflection/discernment within the community of faith
5. Engagement with the public sphere and public discourse
6. The consequences of orthopraxis, not least in working for social justice
7. Attempts at enculturation - how do the metaphors of Christian discourse work in different cultural contexts? (p.13-14)

While it could be argued that the practice of prayer most closely correlates to the inner goods of holiness, and that of theological reflection to that of wisdom, there is as we have seen a clear overlap between each of these virtues. The third activity that I would claim as part of a broad understanding of Christian life as liturgical is that of orthopraxis or, more simply, service.

This of course takes countless different forms but generally can be considered as either pastoral or social justice based, orientated towards the dilemmas of individuals or the transformation of the structures of society. Implicit in this is a bringing of the Gospel into dialogue with any given situation. This is an older and more honourable understanding of the word evangelism than the sales technique and proselytism to which it is often reduced in the contemporary church. It may well be that this dialogue is undertaken in an adaptive language where by the language of faith is not overtly used or translated into a language of values that are accessible to those for whom the language of faith would be a no go area (think for

example of a Christian senior executive in a large secular organisation), or it may be that the language of faith is used overtly. Either way, Bretherton in his reflections on Christian witness amidst moral diversity suggests that the key characteristic of such a dialogue from the Church's point of view must be hospitality (Bretherton, 2006). Hospitality will therefore be the embodiment of holiness and wisdom within a context of orthopraxis.

There is however one more practice that I would want to place within the panoply of liturgical Christian living and one which perhaps has it closest correlate to the penitential rite in the Eucharistic liturgy, that is the practice of accountability. Nicholas Healy was quoted in Chapter 4 questioning the potential naivety of practice-based approaches to character formation. Practices he claimed were open to misconstrual and mistaken intention - hence the need for some form for accountability and oversight within the life of the Christian community and individual. (Healy, 2003) This may be done corporately or individually, but it needs to encompass the whole community. It may take the form of traditional spiritual direction, or the more recent emerging practice of mentoring.

Thus we begin to get a feel for what an architecture of learning might look like within the community of faith. None of this is particularly radical; indeed much of it is a simple reappropriation and adaption of the classic tradition. A learning church then creates a learning architecture that comprises a series of practices within the domains of worship, theological reflection and service. It is my contention that these practices create transitional space and that they can be experienced and interpreted at a symbolic level beyond the presenting literal experience. The metaphor of hospitality is not unhelpful as each of these practices create a hospitable space for the negotiation of meaning and identity.

### **7.2.3 Institutional / Organisational Implications of policy**

What then are the institutional and organisational ramifications of such an approach? To answer this question we must revisit Wenger's elucidation of



Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998). It is important however to realise that communities of practice are merely a pedagogical technology and have no explicit or implicit teleology. Notwithstanding that, they offer insights that we overlook at our peril.

Wenger suggests that the design of learning architectures consists of four dimensions; each of which involves a creative tension between two elements (p.232ff).

1. Participation and Reification: these elements were explored in chapter 4, but when it comes to designing an architecture for learning there are trade-offs to be made. How is adaptability maintained in the face of potential rigidity, or in ecclesial terms - at what point does the reification of concepts into sacramental forms preclude rather than facilitate participation (this question is as much about doctrine as it is about liturgy)?
2. Designed and Emergent: This is always a tension within the context of an inherited tradition. How much are we bound by the inheritance and what liberty is there to innovate and adapt? This is of particular interest given Wenger's assertion that '...practice is not the result of design but rather a response to it.' (p.233)
3. Local and Global: This again is a tension well known within the Church. Wenger makes two paradoxical statements: "No community can fully design the learning of another" and "No community can fully design its own learning." (p.234) Thus we again see the centrality of a dynamic of negotiation in this and the other dimensions. Learning is a negotiation between those who learn and those who teach, it is local to the context in which it is taking place but responsive to the wider environment.
4. Identification and Negotiability: this element of design allows for the participants to negotiate their engagement with the practices and to decide on their level of participation /non-participation.

These are the tensions and issues that a learning Church will have to face in the design of its own programme of development. Such dynamics are complex and difficult to handle and are simply not conceivable within a utilitarian, acquisitive model of church. It is perhaps this very dynamic that militates against extrinsic and intrinsic orientations, as it is simply too complicated to deliver static outcomes. What we are discovering is that a learning architecture that will facilitate the development of a virtuous or sanctified ecclesial character will always be dynamic, always subject to negotiation. Such restlessness predisposes itself towards a quest orientation.

Wenger goes on to identify another set of components that he describes as infrastructure for learning. These don't have the same dynamic tensions as the above dimensions, but he suggests that the learning architecture must contain facilities for engagement (which include mutuality, competence and continuity), imagination (which include orientation, reflection and exploration) and alignment (which include convergence, coordination and arbitration) (p.237).

Such an agenda on paper looks somewhat daunting, and impossible to realise, but Wenger is clear that this architecture is not something new, not something that he has invented but merely a reflection and analysis of what he has seen in functional organisations and educational programmes. Indeed I believe we already have such architecture within the heart of Church of England ecclesial practice. *Common Worship*, the body of liturgy and liturgical structures which the Church of England launched at the turn of the millennium seems to encapsulate Wenger's architecture, offering opportunities to negotiate participation and reification, inherited and emergent, local and global, participation and non-participation, while giving room for engagement of many kinds, imagination and an alignment that gives it integrity and coherence.

### ***Formation in Holiness***

If the authorised liturgy of the Church can be seen as a Rule for worship, and Common Worship has demonstrated that such a Rule can contain the dynamics of the learning architecture we examined above, and in so doing creates a place for individuals and communities to manage their dependency through the oscillation process, then it models the potentially dynamic Rules that would introduce similar dynamics to theological reflection and service, be it pastoral or justice orientated.

The notion of Rules continues to have overtones of deontological/Kantian ethics. This is not what is being argued for here. Rather the commitment to a dynamic process of formation within the context of a variety of sacramental practices (broadly understood) that seeks to produce the inner goods of holiness, wisdom and orthopraxis.

The concept of Rule has historically worked to personalise or customise specific practices within the Church for the use of individuals or a community. Martin Thornton revisited the practice in his book *Pastoral Theology: a reorientation* (1956). For Thornton two things were necessary to guide an individual in the spiritual life, firstly a personalised Rule customising what he called the more general Rule of the Church, containing commitments to a) attendance at Mass, b) saying the Daily Office and c) private prayer; and secondly all of this set in the context of individual accountability to a spiritual director. The purpose is clear – formation in holiness.

As we examine the construction of ecclesial character within a learning Church, the recovery of the concept of a Rule covering commitments to worship, theological reflection and service of some kind is worth revisiting. The sheer number of people currently drawn to be oblates, companions or members of third orders of monastic communities might suggest that it was.

The function of such a Rule would be to create a dynamic repertoire of practices that would regulate and manage the oscillation process and thus the individual's dependency needs by the creation of a transitional space wherein the symbolic/sacramental practices of the Rule can be performed. In this way it facilitates the negotiation of identity and the integration of the individual.

And so it is with the Church as institution. A commitment to becoming a learning organisation, questing for an ever greater understanding of the God it professes to follow and the inner goods that quest promises, through a shared repertoire of practices that are customisable at a local level and that are dynamic in construction and performance, it is this that will ultimately build a virtuous or sanctified character. This personal and corporate faithfulness to the quest regardless of the external goods that may or may not be produced as a consequence will reshape and redefine the mission of the Church in society.

#### ***Church as Vicarious Remnant***

But there is one more significant consequence for the organisational and institutional life of the Church that this study points to, and it is perhaps the most controversial. The Church Growth movement has at its heart a yearning to increase numerical participation in the life of the Church, and thus orientates itself to this as a primary goal. As we have seen through our exploration of participation/ non-participation as a means for defining and negotiating identity, this dynamic is more complicated, more nuanced than a simple in or out.

Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002) suggest four main levels of participation in Communities of Practice:

- Core Group (inc. coordinator)
- Active
- Peripheral

- Outsider

These levels would seem to map quite clearly the experience of many parishes.<sup>89</sup> Wenger, McDermott & Snyder's insights are crucial – they suggest that a 'good community architecture invites many different levels of participation...' (p.55).

They go on to say:

The key to good community participation and a healthy degree of movement between levels is to design community activities that allow participants at all levels to feel like full members. Rather than force participation, successful communities 'build benches' for those on the sidelines. They make opportunities for semi-private interaction, whether through private discussion rooms on the community's Web site, at a community event, or in a one-to-one conversation. This keeps the peripheral members connected. At the same time, communities create opportunities for active members to take limited leadership roles, such as leading a development project that requires a minimal time commitment. To draw members into more active participation, successful communities build a fire in the center of the community that will draw people to its heat. (p.57-58)

This it would seem is a clear endorsement of the primacy of inner goods over external ones. All levels of participation need nurture, but it is the development of the fire at the centre that is ultimately the life-giving element in any community.

Ecclesialogically this brings us back to Martin Thornton. Thornton (1956) argues not just for a regulation of the life of faith (in psychodynamic terms,

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<sup>89</sup> This insight is key in rooting this in the reality of parish life. Wenger et al's recognition of an individual's membership of a variety of communities of practice (what he calls 'multimembership') and their ability to control the nature of that membership by policing their level of participation is about as real as it gets in parish ministry. An understanding of this will be key of developing sustainable patterns of parish ministry in the future.

the oscillation process) through the Rule, but also that the key focus in the life of the Church should not be the 'yet-to-be-evangelised', but rather what he calls 'the remnant', that inner core group that stoke the fire through their disciplined living of the life of faith, living the tradition through embodied practices which seek to produce the inner goods that are latent in them. A Church with a developed virtuous or sanctified character then will ultimately be a vicarious Church, one that offers itself and its life in the service of others. It will be a Church that seeks not its own survival or position in society, but rather one that, through its own inner life, is able to offer itself to hold temporarily for both individuals and the wider society that which they are unable to hold for themselves (Carr, 1997). Such an approach roots us clearly in the ontological orientation of Fromm and rejects the fragmentation of character born of the acquisitiveness of the New Capitalism that we identified as so prevalent in society and in the Church. These inner goods ultimately provide sacramental transitional space, shaped by the Christian narrative and tradition, that facilitates the mature management of human dependency and in so doing contributes to the liberation and wellbeing of both individuals and society.

## **Chapter 8: A Case Study – virtue and theological education in the Church of England**

In the previous chapter I identified some putative conclusions and began to trace what an ecclesiology based around virtue might look like. In this chapter I will now apply that analysis to the field of theological education in the Church of England.

The last ten years have seen a significant overhaul in theological education in the Church of England and the situation remains one of significant upheaval. *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church* (Archbishops' Council, 2003) otherwise known as the Hind Report started the ball rolling with a root and branch review of structures of ordination training within the church. This was followed in 2006 by *Shaping the Church for the Future* (Archbishops' Council, 2006) that sought to put some flesh on the bones in terms of curriculum design and expectations of achievement. Curriculum design and assessment are the focus of the current initiative to develop a common centrally validated curriculum called *Common Awards*.

These initiatives have been driven by a variety of factors, not least the need to keep costs down for the Church in the light of the government removal of the cap on university tuition fees in 2010. Other factors that have influenced these reviews have been the age of ordinands being sponsored for ordination training and the variety of different training pathways being offered to meet the needs of candidates as well as the needs of the new missional situation in which the Church finds itself. The world of theological education in the Church of England is one that is changing fast and one in which there is currently much to play for, and into which I would suggest an understanding of the Church based around the concept of virtue has much to offer.

It is worth noting however that in the Church of England theological education almost exclusively refers to ministerial training. Lay discipleship

training beyond nurture course level is fragmentary and essentially left to diocesan initiatives (some of which are more successful and promoted more vigorously than others) and disseminating information from an office in Church House London on independently produced courses, often to do with discipleship in the workplace. This is not the place to analyse or comment on this imbalance, and for the purposes of this paper a focus on theological education as it informs training and formation for ministry will suffice, not least in the light of our recognition of the sacramental nature of the Church, and the priestly nature of the whole community of faith. Thus this chapter seeks to analyse current policies of ministerial training information within the Church of England in the light of a virtue-based ecclesiology.

We will begin by exploring a very extreme model of clergy selection and training influenced by deeply by a consumerist, acquisitive model of the Church. While this model is not official church policy, its influence can be detected in church at diocesan and parish level in particular contexts. I will then go on and examine the current official policies of the Church of England on training and formation in the light of what we have already posited about a virtue ecclesiology. I will then look at the emerging Common Awards initiative and explore what Wenger's architecture of learning might have to offer such a project.

We have already explored the work of Bob Jackson and held him up as an exemplar of the consumerist/new-capitalist/acquisitive approach to the life of the church. For Jackson, unrepentantly, the key task of the church is to grow numerically. It comes then as no surprise that his approach to clergy selection, training and deployment is motivated primarily by this goal.

In his book *Hope for the Church* (Jackson 2002), he is quite explicit about this:

If ...it is true that clergy with the appropriate characteristics and mindset are likely to lead churches into growth, then recruitment,



selection and training become significant long-term determinants of the growth potential of the Church of England. In particular, the old pastoral model whereby clergy are selected on the basis of pastoral sensitivity rather than gospel enthusiasm may need an overhaul. In the post-Christendom world of the future, the church will need fewer pastors and more missionaries. (Jackson 2002, p.161)

Jackson goes on to say that practical leadership skills may be more important than academic skills for the leaders of tomorrow's church. He says:

When a new incumbent is called upon to turnaround a failing operation with a turnover of £200,000 p.a., half a dozen paid staff, a crumbling mediaeval building, the parish share debt, and complex interaction of activities, a detailed knowledge of the book of Habakkuk may not be her most potent weapon. (p.161)

Indeed Jackson suggests that the skills of leadership and management can be taught and learnt unlike clergy 'talent' which he defines as 'that which is inbuilt and cannot be taught or learnt' (p.157). Thus he suggests that any vaguely intelligent adult could be taught the skills of church leadership without any need for a sense of vocation or an intrinsic goodness or virtue. This is functionalism in its purest and simplest form.

Jackson goes on to suggest that the current mechanism for those training for ministry to acquire practical skills, the curacy, is hit-and-miss, in terms of the potential relationship between incumbent and curate, the expectations of the parish laity, and the knowledge base from which the training incumbent is operating. It should be said that these accusations are not totally without foundation. Curate-Incumbent relations can be poor despite the hard work done by dioceses in engineering a match and indeed despite the best intentions of both curate and incumbent. It is also possible that congregations don't fully understand the primary focus of a curacy as a time

of training and formation, though this can be mitigated in most circumstances by some consistent preparation of the congregation prior to the curate's arrival. The accusation of outdated knowledge and value base in training incumbents is perhaps the most serious charge levelled by Jackson. Dioceses generally take considerable care in who they place curates with and those asked to be training incumbents are generally among the most trusted of diocesan clergy. This arrangement is becoming more difficult to sustain with the emergence of Ordained Local Ministers (OLMs) or Locally Deployed Ministers (LDMs) whose training incumbents tend to be the incumbents of the parishes that have produced them regardless of whether or not they have the skills to be a good trainer. Notwithstanding this, if Jackson's accusations still hold, then he paints a seriously low view of the abilities of parish clergy, one that I believe to be unmerited and unreflective of the general picture.

Jackson identifies three characteristics of the clergy that he believes to be key in their effectiveness (p.159-60); firstly their age – parishes with clergy under 45 years old are seen to be more likely to 'grow' their parishes than those with clergy over than age; secondly the length of incumbency is also identified as being critical, ideally between 7 and 13 years according to Jackson; and thirdly the absence of pastoral or personal breakdown – it is not clear whether Jackson is suggesting that incumbents who suffer breakdowns should be removed from their posts as they risk running their parishes into decline. Indeed this word 'decline' is central to Jackson's argument. He claims that these characteristics for clergy, identified above, are necessary "if the Church of England is serious about halting its own decline" (p.160).

It would seem that it is the fear of decline that motivates Jackson's thinking. Here we need to question whether or not this is a true analysis of the current situation. While numerical decline is indisputable it may be that 'decline' generally is not the most helpful way of viewing the current situation of the Church. I would suggest that there is a massive realignment

going on in British society, one that reflects its post-modern, post-colonial, pluralist context. The symptoms of numerical decline may well be just that, symptoms, and the root cause might be much, much more complicated. In this light it would seem that Jackson's proposals are less missional and more 'restorationist' in the sense of restoring the Church of England to the perceived dominance it had in earlier generations, whereas the reality might be that the Church is at least in as good if not in better shape both spiritually and materially than it has often been perhaps since the Reformation. History shows that the golden age to which so many hark back to never actually existed.<sup>90</sup> Thus the functionalism we can detect in Jackson's approach to selection, training and deployment of clergy is fundamentally based on a questionable premise. His central concern is made clear in his assertion that if the church followed these guidelines... "it would seem that, over a period of years, such policies pay off in the diocesan attendance statistics." (p.165)

Paradoxically Jackson in his second book *Going for Growth* (Jackson, 2005) criticises the Christendom model of Church and ministry:

In the Christendom model of church, clergy are principally pastors to congregations, chaplains to local communities and theologians for a Christian society. It is those qualities that the selection procedures are traditionally designed to uncover and promote. But this world is fast being left behind. The Church of the future must be a missionary church or a dying one. Parts of society may still have some Christendom characteristics, other parts may have become post-Christian, other segments are fast changing from post-Christian to non-Christian. The pastor-chaplain-theologian may be ill-equipped to lead a newly mission-focused church. (p.120)

This thesis fully recognises the need for a radical reappraisal of ministry within the new context in which the Church finds itself, indeed my contention is that most of the solutions being explored by the Church are

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<sup>90</sup> See Robin Gill (1993 and 2003)

simply not radical enough for this new environment. This is particularly true for such restorationist /acquisitive models such as suggested by Jackson. Rather than radically rework concepts such as pastor and public theologian for a new age, he simply rejects them in favour of an entrepreneurial leader, in an age when our society is not short of entrepreneurial leaders. Paradoxically it is perhaps the ability of the public theologian to speak truth to power that is most likely to advance the cause of the Kingdom by recapturing the imagination of the nation and thus who is the most effective missionary in the long run.

What is alarming about Jackson's approach to ministry and ministerial selection, formation and training is his caricaturing and ultimately rubbishing of all that is inherited. He offers a chart that contrasts the characteristics of 'traditional' models of ministry with those he suggests will characterise future paradigms – one is the antithesis of the other (p.121). This is not nuanced thinking, nor does it engage with any notion of negotiating a new model of paradigm of ministry through a community of practice and/or an engagement with anything or anyone else. Indeed Jackson reveals himself to be as authoritarian in his attitudes and certainties as those he characterises within 'traditional' models of ministry. With regard to actual training of clergy Jackson make little comment beyond saying it is really beyond the scope of his book. In what little he does say he makes clear that any training should focus primarily on the practical skills of the job, after all this is what they were 'recruited' to do. Clergy without the skills to lead a church into growth should be taught them, but Jackson laments that this is unlikely to happen in the near future as...

It is still possible to characterise some training course or college experience as being education in theology rather than training for a job. This is inevitable when colleges and courses are staffed primarily by theologians rather than practitioners. (p. 122)

I have deliberately chosen to critique Jackson's work as it represents such an extreme and clear articulation of the new capitalist/acquisitive approaches to Church and to ministry - for Jackson there is no need to develop character, either individually or corporately, because all that is needed is the skills (that can be taught and learnt) to grow a Church. There is no meaning to be negotiated; it is simply to be transferred. While such an approach might indeed be successful in numerical terms in the short term, and while it may well have the potential to create successful and well-managed non-profit organisations, this model does not have potential for the implicit vicariousness that we have seen in a Church that is primarily sacramental in nature. Jackson's approach does not represent mainstream Church of England policy, but as we saw above his ideas are gaining popularity in certain dioceses - his influence should not be underestimated.

Now, however, we will turn our attention to those more mainstream approaches to selection, formation and training within the Church of England

### **8.1 Ministry Division Policies in the light of Virtue Ethics**

One of the great debates within Church of England ministry in recent years has been over the professionalization of the clergy – to what extent is are the clergy 'professionals'. This debate is somewhat confused by the two potential meanings of the word 'professional' – do the clergy live what they 'profess'? Well, hopefully! Are they (and indeed, should they be) part of a formally trained, certified, regulated and appraised workforce? Well, that's more complicated.

Recent writers have warned against the lure of professionalism e.g. Leach 1998 and Moody 1992 suggesting that something of almost intangible value gets lost when Christian ministry gets formally construed as a profession. Others have been less antagonistic (Carr, 1985) to the adoption of professional values while still recognising that ministry will have its own

unique characteristics that are not entirely compatible with secular understandings of professionalism.

The policies of the Church of England have not been so coy. A document entitled *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy* published in 2003 sets a benchmark for clerical conduct and behaviour based on the Ordinal. These guidelines conclude with a Theological Reflection written by Dr. Francis Bridger which, fascinatingly, contains a section on virtue, indeed this would seem to be the only official document that makes an overt connection between virtue and ministry published by the Church in recent years. Bridger welcomes the revival of virtue ethics:

From this, two points stand out: firstly, the Christian Minister must *deliberately* cultivate Christian character and virtues and not leave them to chance. In Pauline language, he or she must seek the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5.22-23). When we ask what this might entail in terms of professional ethics, Karen Lebacqz argues for two central virtues: trustworthiness and prudence. The former is a matter of integrity or honour so that the Minister is recognised as 'trustworthy trustee'. The latter has to do with wise judgement or discernment. The combination of both is necessary for the Minister to develop an instinct for doing the right. (Bridger, F. 2003 p.19)

Bridger goes on to acknowledge the centrality of 'habits of the heart' in cultivating ethical behaviour that is ultimately guided by instinct. He concludes:

The report's discussion of the Ordinal recognises this and reminds us that the sustenance of virtue cannot be left to chance. The spiritual life of the minister is crucial. (p.20)

We are already a long way from the approach recommended by Bob Jackson, indeed Bridger expresses the key argument of this thesis admirably. But has this trajectory laid out in 2003 been followed, has Bridger's aspiration been supported by Ministry Division policy and practice in selection, training and formation of candidates for ministry in the Church? I will now briefly outline current Ministry Division practices in selection and Initial Ministerial Education (both pre-ordination and post-ordination) and then go on to examine these policies to see if they might contribute to the formation of virtuous character both within those training for ministry and in the Church more widely.

The Hind Report (2003), as we have seen, ushered in a new age of theological and ministerial education. It contains a clear summary statement of expectations for Ministerial Education:

The church seeks that all God's people grow in faith, deep in their discipleship, and learn more deeply to 'inhabit godly wisdom'. As part of God's people, and in order to enable such growth in others, the Church seeks ministers who:

- are firmly rooted in the love of God, discipleship of Jesus Christ, and dedicated or deepening pilgrimage of faith in the holy spirit;
- are passionate about the transformation of the whole created order into one that reflects the redemptive love of God;
- are deeply committed to loving service in the church as a sign and instrument of God's love for the world;
- immerse themselves, with faithful obedience, in the Church's life of prayer and worship, and its critical engagement with Scripture and the Christian tradition;
- are dedicated to bring their gifts of leadership, pastoral care, worship and mission to the service of the Church

through their calling to ordination. (Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church 2003 p.57)

The report went on to tabulate statements as to how these expectations might play out at various levels. These statements covered Levels 1, 2, 3 and M level. At each level there were statements of expected levels of achievement in three areas (p.58-9):

- Being – growing in faith, discipleship, prayer and vocation
- Knowing and Understanding
- Doing - developing skills in and for ministry

These three areas map neatly onto the areas of holiness, wisdom and right action (orthopraxis) identified in the previous chapter. However this structure was not to be sustained or developed in practice.

The publication in 2005 of *Shaping the Future – new patterns of training for lay and ordained* introduced the Nine Criteria (A-I) which have become central to selection and training since then. These Nine Criteria have 'learning objectives' or statements of achievements/competencies at selection, the point of ordination, and on completion of Initial Ministerial Education (IME) (with added expectations for those who wish to proceed to incumbency). The nine areas covered are: vocation; ministry in the Church of England; spirituality; personality and character; relationships; leadership and collaboration; mission and evangelism; faith; and quality of mind.

At selection candidates are interviewed and assessed against each of these criteria. Each criterion has a summary statement of expectation followed by a more detailed breakdown of the expectation. Included also are a variety of examples as to how candidates can evidence the criterion on which they are being assessed. For example, the summary statement for Criterion G Faith reads as follows<sup>91</sup>:

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<sup>91</sup> <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1274926/criteria%20document%20-%20web.pdf>



Candidates should show an understanding of the Christian faith and a desire to deepen their understanding. They should demonstrate a personal commitment to Christ and a mature, robust faith which shapes their life and work. Candidates should show an ability to reflect critically on their faith and make connections between faith and contemporary life. They should demonstrate a capacity to communicate their faith engagingly and effectively.

The more detailed breakdown of this Criterion looks like this:

G 1: Candidates should have a personal commitment to Christian faith.

G 2: Candidates should show a knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith

G 3: Candidates should be able to communicate their faith effectively

G 4: Candidates should be able to respect and work with those whose understanding of Christian faith is different from their own

Each sub-criterion can be evidenced in a variety of ways, for example the candidate can evidence Criterion G 1: 'Candidates should have a personal commitment to Christian faith' in any of the following ways:

- Show a personal commitment to a relationship with Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord
- Have a deep and robust faith which has been able to wrestle with doubt, disappointment and failure
- Live out the Gospel in who they are and what they do
- Discern God at work in his/ her life through times of joy and sorrow

Assuming that a candidate is recommended for training then a variety of pathways are open to them, most of which will involve formal academic study validated by a higher education institution to either diploma, graduate

or post-graduate level. The more tricky aspect of 'formation' is done within the context of the college or course of which the candidate is a member, and through a variety of placements in different ministerial contexts and with a variety of practitioners. The Nine Criteria are still used to report on candidates' achievements only the bar has been raised incrementally. The Learning Outcomes for Criterion G: Faith for candidates at the point of ordination (regardless of what academic pathway they followed) are as follows.

Candidates should:

- demonstrate a growing critical engagement with scripture and the traditions of Christian thought, characterised by faithful obedience and openness to new insights.
- form a life of study and reflection within the demands and disciplines of initial training and the expectations shaped by public ministry.

By the end of IME, the learning objectives for associate ministers in this Criterion are to:

- be able to engage confidently with the Bible as text and as holy scripture, as skilled interpreters and communicators in relation to fundamental traditions of Christian thought.
- form and sustain a life of disciplined study and reflection that sustains in public ministry.

...and for those applying for a post of incumbent status or similar, to:

- demonstrate a readiness and openness for a ministry of oversight and vision, expressed in continued study, reflection, openness to new insights, maturity and physical self care.
- form and sustain a life of disciplined study and reflection that sustains in leadership.

Ministry Division provide an Assessment grid as guidance as to how each of these criteria are to be assessed. Each learning outcome is view through the lens of a) Basic knowledge, b) Performance Criteria, c) Performance evidence and d) 'Range' meaning the range of situations in which a candidate should be able to apply this aspect of ministry. As an example to last criteria mentioned above ... the candidate should be to "form and sustain a life of disciplined study and reflection that sustains public ministry" is assessed thus:

Learning Outcome	Basic knowledge	Performance criteria	Performance evidence	Range
<b>Form and sustain a life of disciplined study and reflection that sustains in leadership.</b>	Self-knowledge of personal aptitude for study and reflection using a variety of means and awareness of its importance in enabling the sustenance of public ministry <i>and leadership.</i>	Use a variety of study methods and models of theological reflection appropriate to leadership and personal attitude.	Evidence of sustained study and reflection throughout IME phase. Account of how particular pieces of study or reflection have had an impact on their public ministry.  Evidence of a thought through commitment to ongoing study and reflection to include specific plans for further CPD.	Study and reflection relating to leadership styles and issues.

*Table 1. Example of Learning Outcome breakdown*

By the end of IME, for candidates who are looking to move to a post of First Responsibility there are forty-six such criteria to be assessed!

I have undertaken this description of current Ministry division policies for selection, training and formation because it is vital to understand the structure of current policy and practice before we analyse them in the light of virtue ecclesiology.

### **8.1.1 Through the Lens of Virtue Ecclesiology**

The next task then is to review and critique these policies through the lens of what we have learnt about virtue ecclesiology. This is far from straightforward because they are produced by very different world-views. The first thing to note about the nine criteria is that they are very assessment driven – this is an evidence-driven approach to selection, training and formation. This opens up the danger that we have already identified of valuing what is measurable rather than measuring what is valuable. However, in its favour, the range of assessment methodology is broad and encompasses much narrative assessment - evidence offered may be as much formative as summative.

All this begs the question - why is this being assessed, why is assessment beyond the summative assessment of the higher education institution involved in validating the candidates' degree or diploma level qualification necessary? There might seem to be a number of possible answers to this question. Assessment generally shows a rigorous approach to training and formation and thus demands to be taken seriously by other professions; it can act as a focus for those designing the formational context to ensure that certain experiences and opportunities are built into the (para-)curriculum; and, perhaps more cynically, it enables the Church to evidence that it has delivered its side of the training deal.

So the learning outcomes, perhaps unsurprisingly, have agendas attached to them, and it is inevitable that these agendas will influence and shape their overall nature. Another major influence of the effectiveness of these learning outcomes will be their performance. As read off a page, they are as notes on a musical score –how they are animated and given life across the diversity of Church of England training institutions is a fundamental issue in the formation of character – will their spirit be embraced or will it simply be a box ticking exercise following the prescriptive text? This theme of performance is one to which we shall return later in this discussion.

In analysing the nine criteria and their associated learning outcomes it is important to note that virtuous character will not be confined to one criterion in particular (e.g. Personality and Character), but pervade the whole set. So how much potential do those criteria and their learning outcomes have to produce individuals committed to the development of virtuous character (holiness, wisdom and right action) in themselves and the Church in which they serve? To find out I will examine the Assessment Grid for those finishing IME and moving to an incumbent level post.

### *Holiness*

Holiness itself is not explicitly mentioned in the learning outcomes at this level, nor indeed is sanctification. However the word 'integrity' appears a number of times. Candidates are required to show integrity '...in the pressure and change entailed in public ministry'<sup>92</sup> their relationship are to be marked with integrity as is their leadership and collaboration with others. Likewise in mission and evangelism they are required to show integrity in the understanding of '...the nature of contemporary society with different groups in church and community.'

But is integrity an adequate synonym for holiness, is there any recognition that this integrity is a gift of Grace through prayers and offering of life? Candidates are required to evidence '...a life and ministry formed, sustained and energized by trust in and dependence on the gifting and grace of God' as well as the fact that they have formed and sustained '...a life of prayer that provides sustenance for the strains and joys of leadership'. It is expected that this life of prayer will be the 'chief sustenance for ministry'.

So how successfully do the criteria and learning outcomes direct the candidate and their training institutions towards a life of holiness? It is fair to say that while there is some basic recognition of the inner dynamics of the life of holiness, these are never developed to their full potential. The criteria never demand personal holiness or overt personal sanctification either

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<sup>92</sup> Ministry Division *Assessment Grids for potential incumbents*

explicitly or even implicitly. Even allowing for semantic differences, the integrity the criteria calls for falls short of the inner goods that are so explicitly part of MacIntyre's virtue agenda. Indeed, as we have seen, prayer is seen as a means to an end, a form of sustenance for ministry, a resource and a place to retreat to amidst the strains of ministry. This reading of prayer sees it less for the value of the inner goods that it might produce, and more as a resource for producing the external goods of ministry.

Likewise the ontological virtue of the minister is never considered explicitly. It would seem that the teleology of the criteria is clearly competence rather than virtue, and that personal integration and devotion is valued as a means to achieve this overall ministerial competence. It is not the purpose of this thesis to devalue ministerial competence, far from it, but rather to question whether or not in the long run ministerial pragmatism projects the fullness of the Gospel adequately to recapture the imagination of this and future generations. The question, which I will seek to answer below, arises - what is the teleology of ministry that the Church requires and how can our expectations of training and formation be best configured to enable this to happen?

We also saw in earlier chapters how significant membership of a community of practice is in forming identity. Once again the criteria and learning outcomes are somewhat ambivalent about this. While it should be said that elsewhere within the Hind report and subsequent Ministry Division documentation the language of formation in community is used (again, there may be issues about the performance of this text), there is little to support it overtly in the learning objectives. Reference is of course made to the communal nature of ministry and the social context in which ministry takes place, but there is no real recognition that these contexts are formative and are places where the identities of both individuals and the whole community are negotiated.

So is the language of holiness absent from the Nine Criteria and the associated Learning Outcomes? No, it isn't, but it is only in there in a very veiled and uncommitted way. It might seem that here we have a case of the good being the enemy of the best. There is an implicit language hidden away amongst these learning outcomes, but it could offer so much more were it brought into much greater prominence. Ultimately the model of ministry /priesthood being offered here is functional, not in the flagrant and aggressive way espoused by Jackson, but the learning outcomes are primarily about the formation of skills and competencies that can be deployed in the active tasks of ministry. What remains open to question is whether or not the process of training and formation develops the vision and wisdom in candidates to make the right call as to when and how their new found competencies should be deployed, and so we must return to the criteria and search for explicit or implicit encouragements to develop wisdom.

### ***Wisdom***

As with holiness, there is no overt reference to wisdom within the criteria or their associated learning objectives at this point in training (the completion of IME). We defined wisdom in the previous chapter as 'sanctified common sense' and we might be able to amplify this with 'holy intuition' or 'educated conscience' which mean more or less the same thing. Can we detect any reference to such a dynamic within the criteria? There certainly are expectations of self-awareness in terms of personality and character and leadership style as well as the negotiation of relationships both within and without the church community. The discipline of theological reflection is listed in the criteria for Faith and Quality of Mind. What is clearly present is an expectation of accountability both to a spiritual director and, it is suggested, to a Rule of Life.

This may be considered formative of a certain kind of wisdom in itself. All of this is well and good, but we find ourselves in very similar territory to that which we covered when examining the criteria for signs of holiness –

notions of wisdom lurk in the shadows but are never brought fully into the daylight. It is entirely possible to detect a theme of wisdom within the criteria, but this theme is never fully developed. Wisdom that is the fruit of personal integration and that is ultimately integrating when shared with others is present implicitly and one wonders why it isn't made more explicit.

***Service (orthopraxis)***

What are present in significant quantity are expectations of what the minister will be able to do. These criteria range from developing and maintaining ecumenical links to '...demonstrating an ability to lead and enable others in faithful witness and to foster mission-shaped churches.' The practical tasks of day-to-day ministry are to be found in abundance however less in evidence is any understanding of the psychodynamics of ministry, those underlying, unconscious dynamics rooted in dependency that, as we have seen, are the real stuff of ministry, whether recognised as such or not.

In conclusion then, if we look at the criteria for selection, training and formation through the lens of virtue ecclesiology we see a somewhat variegated picture. They are clearly not ploughing the same furrow as Jackson's aggressive, pragmatic and acquisitive approach to ministry, but nonetheless they still only present a tool kit and not a vision. They rest firmly within the external goods arena of MacIntyre's thesis. The nine criteria and their learning outcomes seem to treat inner ontology as a means to achieve an external end. This in itself raises an interesting question for virtue ecclesiology as to the role of external goods within it and what might be their relationship with inner goods.

The danger of an almost exclusive focus on inner goods in virtue ecclesiology is that it runs the risk of a form of pietism. This is not desirable. Yet it is the contention of this thesis that an ontology of virtuous character is the most powerful tool that the Church has, by God's grace, to build the Kingdom. The day-to-day tools of ministry are of no use or indeed are



dangerous in the hands of one who has not been sanctified to use them. An assessment methodology that purely or indeed primarily focuses on external goods (measurable achievements) runs the risk of losing sight of the inner goods that are so central to the life of faith and to those who seek to minister in its name.

As we have seen the Hind report (2003) represented a significant gear-change in thinking about ministerial selection, training and formation in the Church of England. Ten years later the Church is going through an equally radical shake-up of its theological education system and it is to that that we turn next.

## **8.2 Common Awards and Learning Architecture**

### **8.2.1 Background to Common Awards**

The change in higher education funding introduced by the government in 2010 acted as a catalyst for a large-scale review of ministerial and theological education in the Church of England and some other denominations<sup>93</sup>. The Church responded to this situation by setting into motion along with some ecumenical partners (the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and the Baptist Union) *Common Awards* that are being designed to be a suite of awards validated centrally (Durham University won the bidding process). The term ‘common’ is described as referring to the shared endeavour between teachers and learners to further the Kingdom of God, the ‘*missio dei*’, alongside a shared commitment to the development of the institutions providing education for ministry and those individuals training for that ministry.<sup>94</sup>

*Common Awards* has unrepentantly been situated within the university sector as its creators have identified the advantages offered by ‘...the

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<http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1578047/preface%20to%20the%20common%20awards.pdf>

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<http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1533743/draft%20prolegomena%20to%20the%20common%20awards.pdf>

exchange of ideas that being part of a vibrant, interdisciplinary community of scholars offers, and the breadth and depth of experience in the development and administration of higher education that a university embodies” (Common Awards Proposal & Rationale 2013 p.1-2). Yet a certain caution is articulated as the authors identify a potential clash of epistemological style and intention between a secular university and a confessional ecclesial body (p.2). Thus *Common Awards* speaks of a preference for the notion of ‘*paideia*’ used by the early church to describe an ‘... education that is holistic, shaping intellect, spirit, affections, relationships and bodily life.’ Implicit in this is an environment whereby this holistic formation can take place. The Preface to Common Awards states:

Institutions will offer teaching and learning in the context of a communal life of prayer and worship which draws the teachers and learners alike back to the source and purpose of all learning, namely to ‘know God and enjoy him forever’.... The patterns of communal life of participating institutions will reflect the Trinitarian community of the Godhead: teachers and learners will engage with one another in relationships of self-giving love expressed in service and mutual vulnerability that, in turn, will shape and form the characters of both learners and teachers into the image of Christ. The communal and collaborative nature of wisdom will be lived out in such communities... The development of a theological *habitus* for participating in God’s mission in the world is at the heart of the content of the Common Awards. (p.3-4)

This is a hugely ambitious programme which the Church is hoping to turn around in a very short time frame. The language used is rich with the overtones of character formation and inner goods and passing reference to the ‘cultivation of virtues, spiritual disciplines, self-mastery and self-awareness’ (p.2) reveal that this initiative is at least conceptually much more in tune with a virtue-based approach. However, there is no evidence in the documentation so far as to how this rich formational environment is to

be delivered, nor is the development of guidance in this area scheduled within the current timeframe towards completion and implementation. Within the existing documentation there is a proposal to integrate academic modules with an applied and/or formational activity<sup>95</sup>. Each module will have an in-built 'integrative exercise' covering either another area of knowledge (possibly from another academic discipline), a practice, the development of character, a deepening of vocation or and experience of ministerial reality. It remains to be seen how these 'integrative exercises' develop and are received by the learners involved. It might be however that they represent a somewhat naive attempt to rationalise the formative curriculum while ignoring the fact that a much more profound formational experience of offered by the communal, institutional and relational dynamics identified in the preface above.

To be fair, it is too early to judge how *Common Awards* will turn out. As it stands it offers an opportunity to the church to define a profound *modus operandi* for ministerial education for a new generation, yet this was the expectation of the Hind report ten years ago and as we have seen many of its possibilities, not least is similar enthusiasm for formation in community, got lost in the details of measurable learning outcomes. Let us hope that the temptation toward systemic neatness and uniformity doesn't cause the same thing to happen to *Common Awards*. All that said, it might not be inappropriate for us to speculate briefly, what a virtue-based ecclesiology might bring to the *Common Awards* table, were it to be offered a seat.

### **8.2.2 Formation in Virtue**

#### ***The Fire and the Clay***

Guiver et al (1993) make a central point when they identify the key task for the ordained person, the priest is to fully become a person, to fully inhabit that gift which is Christ's to us of personhood.

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<http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1578060/proposal%20for%20the%20common%20awards%20oct%202012.pdf>

The heart of the priest's ministry is the making visible of the gift of personhood which is Christ's alone. It is no accident that the parish priest in England became known as the parson, that *persona* who represents Christ's to his people. That representation demands an integrity of faith and life that both points to Christ and reveals the fruitfulness of faith in Christ. It demands that the priest be one who has an evident confidence in Christ as the giver of the self. (Guiver et al 1993 p.17)

This is a rich statement of teleology that expresses well the personal integration that lies at the root of a virtue-based approach. Virtue ecclesiology calls us to be both individually and corporately integrated, and suggests that it is this personal integration that is ultimately integrating for others and for society. The great challenge for individual Christians and for the Church is simply to be who we are meant to be, and any programme of formation must take this seriously. Guiver et al go on to remind us that we can't be who we are meant to be by trying harder, because this knowledge is a gift and one that has two characteristics – this gift is discovered by loving God and by loving our neighbour (p.12-13).

Central to his vision is the realisation that in Jesus Christ, crucified, buried and raised to new life, we are confronted with what being a person is all about. Here is something new. Here is identity and meaning, seen in Jesus Christ and offered to us through him. We might have thought we understood before but we were mistaken. When my sister used to say to her one-year-old daughter, 'hallo, small person,' there was obvious humour in the remark. An infant is a small person, complete in all essentials. Yet we are most aware of potential, not of a finished person. Jesus Christ is the one who was unmistakably 'real' and through him we to make become truly ourselves. (Guiver et al 1993 p.13)

So it is this becoming of ourselves which is gift is at the heart of ministerial and priestly teleology, indeed at the heart of all Christian teleology. The question remains how do we construct an architecture for training and formation that enables this to happen or at least to begin happening. We have already noted the 'characteristics' of the 'gift' of personhood – love of God and love of neighbour and it is through creating an environment when these two can flourish that we can open ourselves to God's gift of personhood.

An individual's expression of their love of God can take many forms, but Guiver et al hold the liturgical expression of this predominant. Of course there will be times of quiet personal prayer, intercession, thanksgiving and silent meditation, but liturgy demands more of us. Its demands are firstly corporate – it's something we do together and not in isolation and it calls us out of a cosy relationship with 'my God'. Here we are challenged by insights and expectations of others who love the same God that we love. Secondly, liturgical structure affects us unconsciously. Liturgy transcends our need for cognitive control, its deepest structures resonate with our deepest psychic structures and shape our souls. This is not simply true of the rich structures within Eucharistic liturgy, but also in the simple structures of a Service of the Word, a Daily Office – preparation leads to an encounter with the Word (ideally through an objective cycle of the lectionary), which in turn leads to a response of praise and intercession for the church and the world. It is the very 'given-ness' of the liturgy (p.81) that challenges us as our lives collide with it and with the story of faith in scripture. The liturgy truly demands our obedience – it is simply there, and in it and through it we perform the story of God's saving acts over and over again. And as we perform them so we are drawn deeper and deeper into them and we become open to receive that gift of personhood the Christ offers.<sup>96</sup> The liturgical performance of the story of faith goes a long way to animate the dry learning outcomes we saw in the Nine Criteria and that potentially exist within *Common Awards*. Thus the

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<sup>96</sup> See Guiver (1996)

acting out of our love of God, our lives of devotion, within a liturgical context becomes central to any architecture of formation.

Just as liturgy is an intentional act of devotion - you have to turn up at a particular place at a particular time and to do and say certain prescribed things - so our love for our neighbour is best expressed in intentional community. This was Bonhoeffer's experience when he wrote *Life Together* (1954) and it has been the experience of Christians throughout history.

Intentional community means deliberately committing to interacting at close quarters with a specific group of others for a specific period of time (which can be a lifetime!). Traditionally in terms of ministerial training this has been done through residential seminaries. This approach has not been without its critics among whom are those who suggest that the 'removal from the world' that this necessitates is in total contradiction to the needs of those whose subsequent ministries will be in the midst of that 'world'. This, I would suggest, is to misunderstand the nature of the residential college experience. What intentional communities do (and for the moment I am working with the hypothesis that residential seminaries are intentional communities!) is not remove its members from the 'world', but simply to give them a microcosm of that world, and ask them to learn to deal with it. To believe that intentional communities of whatever kind are somehow immune from the complexities of life in the world is to misunderstand their dynamics. Such communities force members to face up to the difficulties in relating to others without the usual escape routes and distractions of life in the world. Such intentional communities are truly microcosms in which members' ability to relate to each other are profoundly tested.

Such an analysis throws up two questions: firstly, how do those training for ministry in a non-residential context experience the microcosm of intentional community; and secondly, what if my hypothesis was wrong, what if not all residential seminaries are not de facto intentional communities? Neither of these questions have easy answers, other than to

say with respect to non-residential candidates the experience of intentional community is of such importance that it must be replicated in some form. I would suggest that the dynamics of home parish life, potent as they may be at times, will not suffice (indeed there is an argument that parishes should be much more intentional about their living of community if they are to take their own formation seriously). Non-resident candidates need to be provided with contact with each other so that the emotional niceties of polite conversation are transcended and the deeper dynamics of the group revealed and dealt with. There are a variety of ways that this can be achieved from the very formalised and stylised Work Groups developed by Wilfred Bion, to more spontaneous and naturally occurring opportunities not least in forms of committed mutual service, notwithstanding the need for all of this to be an intentional process.

In the case of a residential community that is not an intentional community, this experience is not uncommon. It is possible to live at close quarters with others and to avoid meaningful interaction with them for a significant period of time. However as we have seen the experience of intentional community is so central to receiving God's gift of personhood as seen in Christ, or to use the language we have used throughout the thesis, the formation of character – that this cannot be left to chance. If as residential seminary is not an intentional community then it needs to be structured in a way that ensures it becomes one. Some of this will be modelled by staff, and some of it will be achieved by setting up structures within the instruction whereby students have little option but to engage in a commitment to intentional community – again, acts of mutual service are a good place to start.

So, in terms of theological education and ministerial training we have noted that the receipt of the gift of personhood or the development of character must, in a virtue-based approach, rank as a central priority. We have seen how Guiver et al have defined the characteristic of the gift, this character as a love of God and a love of neighbour, and we have explored how a

formational architecture might be constructed based on performance of the liturgy and intentional community. Such formational architecture will contextualise and ultimately integrate such learning outcomes that emerge from the more formalised curriculum of *Common Awards* or the like. Such an approach values much of the traditional inherited model of theological education and ministerial formation on the Church of England. It should be noted that there remain significant problems with this model, not least in the lack of consistency in IME between the pre-ordination and post-ordination phases.

### ***Sacred Sagacity***

The dynamics of formation are also explored by Martyn Percy in a paper entitled *Sacred Sagacity: the Dynamics of Formation* first published in the Lambeth Conference edition of the *Anglican Theological Review* and subsequently republished in *Shaping the Church* (Percy, 2010). Percy identifies five characteristics of formation many of which overlap with the material we have just explored. Percy first identifies that ‘...the individual and the institution are set apart for deep and rich composition’ (p.134). This echoes much said above about the need for intentional community rooted around the liturgy. It challenges a misplaced incarnationalism in the contemporary church that says everything must be undertaken ‘in the world’ and be ‘culturally relevant’ and that rejects the notion of being set apart as being of no practical use, a notion I suggest that is a naive reading of scripture not least, as there are very clear themes in Jesus’ ministry of time set aside for his own prayer in the wilderness and for the formation of his disciples. Such a critique is not only a misreading of the oscillating themes of active ministry and renewal in scripture, but it also is an undiscerning approach to culture. This is not real cultural engagement, but rather capitulation to the dominant culture of the age. Percy’s emphasis on being ‘set aside for a deep and rich composition’ points us to that deep formation of character that we are exploring.



Secondly Percy identifies formation as a ‘...progressive and subtle journey’ (p.135). This nuanced approach recognises that we are dealing with something more than the simple transfer of knowledge so beloved of Jackson. This becomes a process whereby a student grows to inhabit a role and there is a negotiation of meaning and/or identity between the individual and the role (p.134). It is this negotiation of identity that we first saw in Wenger’s exposition of Communities of Practice that expresses the dynamics of formation so powerfully. There is a real struggle of identity as the individual learns to inhabit the role and discover how they will make the role their own, and the demands that the role makes on them that changes them and the way that they see and act in the world. Of course this dynamic applies to every new lay Christian as well as those entering ministry. Such a dynamic reaches to the depths of a person’s identity and needs to be taken slowly and gently.

Thirdly Percy talks of the variety of ‘types of knowledge’ within formation. This is territory we have covered fairly comprehensively already. The skill-based knowledge of functionalism is to be contrasted with the more innate ‘knowledge’ (or more properly ‘understanding’) of character and wisdom (p. 136). This latter kind of knowledge is vital for leadership in the church – the challenge is to ensure that it has a place in a context that is very driven by summative assessment.

Percy then helpfully points out the role of ‘openness and vulnerability’ in the formational process (p.137). If the student is to be fully integrated, or at least on the path towards this goal, then he/she will need to come to terms with that which causes them fear, and those things which they find they are unable to do (p.137). Indeed it could be argued that learning to deal with our weaknesses and failures is a key ministerial attribute. This is true both in the priest’s own self-management as he/she learns to live through times of personal crisis, but it also points to one of the more subtle aspects of ministry that is captured in the archetype of the wounded healer.

The fifth and final dynamic Percy points to is the relationship between 'power and wisdom' (p.137). This, it could be argued, is one of the big standoffs that we have been examining throughout this thesis. So much of the energy of the Church Growth movement (exemplified by the work of Bob Jackson) would seem to be about the retrieval of a form of power and influence that the church once had, or even as a retrieval and an attempt to intensify that power. This is a very fundamental dynamic in the life of faith and many would argue that Jesus' ministry exemplified a rejection of power as a tool in controlling others. Certainly power can be seen to be corrupting and power without the wisdom to use it appropriately is potentially dangerous. Percy does not hold back:

...there is no substitute for the cultivation of holy wisdom. (p.137)

Percy's analysis of the dynamics of formation then resonates clearly with a model that takes seriously and values the development of character. The development requires nothing less than the reorientation of an individual's self-understanding and a re-negotiation of their identity. Theologically this is the 'new life in Christ' that discipleship offers and which is amplified in ministry. It reaches way beyond the mere acquisition of skills to the openness to receive a gift that we cannot achieve by our own merits. That gift is characterised by a love of God and a love of our neighbour and any formational structure that is developed must facilitate this process. The wisdom of a period of being set aside within an intentional community that is a microcosm of the wider society is validated, though there remain some issues around implementation in certain categories of training. Alongside this is a commitment to a process of formation within the disciplines of a given liturgy wherein students negotiate their evolving identity in the light of a regular juxtaposition of their experience and Holy Scripture. These then are the practices that begin to allow a dry set of learning outcomes to take life. The curriculum of any formational course must ultimately be performed and MacIntyre would clearly recognise the importance of community and liturgical tradition in so doing.

So is *Common Awards* the antithesis of a virtue-based formation model of theological education and ministerial training? It doesn't have to be, and as this chapter has demonstrated the Church already has the tools to contextualise it in a rich formational environment.

### **8.3 Conclusion**

These are interesting times for theological education and ministerial training in the Church of England as it undertakes its second major review of the system in ten years. The pressures on the system are multiple – financial, missional, organisational and theological. The future shape of the Church is not yet clear and continues to evolve so formation for ministry and theological education more broadly must resource those who will be fulfilling ministerial roles in the future to be responsive and reflective practitioners.

This chapter has mapped different maps of future ministry. We have explored Bob Jackson's passionate belief that the next generation of clergy need to be those who will numerically grow the Church. Within the model we raised questions as to its sustainability and questioned whether or not despite some short-term success, it would not damage the mission of the Church in the long run. This is a trajectory we mapped in the first chapter of this thesis and, as we have seen, the metaphor of 'growth' has not served the secular world well, leading to a crisis of confidence not least in the financial markets and capitalism more generally. It was noted however that this mode of thinking has influenced the church with particular dioceses committing to it in a fairly comprehensive way. The demand for an entirely functionalist priesthood (the adherents of this methodology would probably prefer the term 'church leadership') is influential in the debates shaping the future of training in the Church of England.

The influence of such functionalism can be detected in some of the follow-up work that flowed from the Hind Report. It would be unfair to lay this

entirely at Jackson's door as his books were published contemporaneously. Much of what we can see in *Shaping the Future – new patterns of training for lay and ordained* and the trajectory that has emerged from it shows clearly the influence of being assessment led. The Nine Criteria and the concomitant Learning Outcomes have evolved into a series of forty-six competencies to be achieved by the end of IME. Though themes of holiness and wisdom may be detected latent within these competencies they remain subservient to the functional basis of the assessment criteria.

Thus it seemed that a virtue-based approach might well have something to offer but if it were to do so it would need to define a clear teleology for ministry and for the life of faith itself. This has been done through the work of Guiver et al who identified the fulfilment of personhood as the gift of faith, one that the priest is called to model in a particularly vivid way. It was noted that this gift could not be achieved by personal effort, but was characterised by a love of God and a love of neighbour. A learning architecture to support the formation of such characteristics was then necessary.

Drawing again on the work of Guiver et al and Percy, the key components of this architecture were identified as a commitment to formation both within the context of the given-ness of the liturgy and within an intentional community. This was held to be the case regardless of the mode of training undertaken. While it was recognised that both these processes were part of traditional training and formation with the Church of England, there was recognition that there were problems that needed to be resolved with both. These problems however did not mask the huge impact that these experiences offered those who engaged with them, and their potential to be significant agents in the formation of character and the fulfilment of our innate God-given personhood.

So the Church and particularly those with responsibility have a choice to make, and as Aristotle recognised all those years ago the choice is to do with teleology. Each mode of theological education/ministerial formation that we

have explored has its own teleology, its own rationale, its own end to which it works. In the case of Jackson's work it is the teleology of church growth and numerical strength; in the case of the post-Hind Nine Criteria and their associated learning outcomes it is evidence based assessment; in the case of the virtue-based approach it is the development of character and the fulfilment of personhood. In the end the Church must make its own decision as to which method, which teleology best fits the overall call of the Gospel and needs of the Kingdom. But no one should be in any doubt that this decision matters. This thesis started by recognising that the choices made by secular society to embrace what Sennett calls the New Capitalism has led to a corrosion of character individually and corporately and the new collapse of the economic system on which western society relies. Though God will always remain God, the Church should not underestimate the implications of choosing methodologies and teleologies that do not reflect the essence of the Gospel. These implications are with us already and the Church has already been damaged by them.

It is the contention of this thesis that an understanding of the Church as a community of virtuous character, formed in the likeness of Christ, offers the best possibility for a faithful future. The nature of that future is as yet still unsure and perhaps by definition will always be, but it is by conforming ourselves to the character of Christ, and having His character formed in us individually and corporately, that we will best be resourced to make wise and holy decisions in the face of all that confronts us and which will enable the Church to renew itself in holiness and to offer itself vicariously to the world, as it offers its life on behalf of that world to the glory of God and for the benefit of humanity.

## Conclusion

This study has sought to explore the nature of the Church in a new and unfamiliar social context, that of post-Christendom and post-secularism, and to sketch a possible polity for the Church as it enters this new era. However, before we can draw any tentative conclusions from it, we must ensure that the picture I have painted is a realistic one – does it reflect the reality of the contemporary Church of England, or is it a caricature? Of course there is more than one reality, depending one's point of perception, but is the picture that I have painted congruent with the general nature and feel of the church today? We have already seen Wenger et al's nuanced understanding of an individual's multi-membership of a variety of communities of practice that would include their local church community, and the ability an individual has to control their level of participation, which is so much a part of the complex reality of parish life. However, to answer this question properly we will have to look at some of the evidence offered by sociology.

A detailed picture of the wider religious trends within British society has been offered by the Religion and Society Research Programme, led by Professor Linda Woodhead.<sup>101</sup> This has been large-scale research programme that has sought to identify the role and function of religion in contemporary Britain. As part of the project, Woodhead made a presentation to parliamentarians at Westminster in which she offered the following statistics, amongst others (Woodhead 2013):

- The 2011 census recorded 59% of people in England and Wales self-identifying as Christian, a drop from 71% in 2001
- 13% of Great Britons who self-identified as Anglicans claimed to be churchgoers, 87% were non-attenders
- 18% of people questioned thought that the Church of England was a positive force in society, 14% thought it was a negative force, 58% thought it was neither positive nor negative, and 10% didn't know, though there was

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<sup>101</sup> <http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk>

clear evidence that many still considered it integral to English culture and heritage as well as an ethical voice in society.

- Nationally and across the denominational divide, adherents are much more likely to rely on their own reason and judgement, their own intuition or feeling than are on either local or national religious leaders for guidance.
- The number of occasional offices (baptisms, weddings and funerals) done by the Church of England has plummeted and the end of the twentieth century and continues to do so in the twenty-first.
- Church leaders are shown to be out of step with the moral convictions and the socio-political values of both younger church members and the population as a whole.

Woodhead ends her analysis by suggesting that the religious institutions of Great Britain have failed to connect with a population that generally sees itself as fundamentally spiritual.

This research then provides the context in which the Church of England finds itself and to which it is reacting both consciously and unconsciously. It echoes the earlier research of Grave Davie on believing without belonging (Davie 1994 p.93ff). This notion is developed further by Davie when she charts the movement 'from obligation to consumption' in Northern European religious practice (Davie 2006). Davie then goes on in her work to develop the theory of 'vicarious religion' (2007, 2010) which, as I have suggested above, may well play a significant part in the self-understanding of a virtuous Church in the future, though it is worth noting that the reality and long-term sustainability of a vicarious model of Church is contested by Bruce & Voas (2010).

All of this, I suggest, concurs with the picture of the commodification of faith within a Neo-Capitalist model of Church, and the potential for an alternative vicarious model. Within the national and European context, I suggest my analysis is coherent.

But is it true at a local, parochial level? Arguably one of the great strengths of the Church of England is its model of dispersed leadership. Notwithstanding the fact that it is governed by 'the bishop in synod', local parishes have significant autonomy to disregard what the bishop, or synod, or both, says! Does parochial life carry on regardless of these national and international trends? It would be surprising, given the size of the demographic shift, if it did. Thus we must briefly survey the evidence to ensure that my overarching description of ecclesial life, national and locally, remains valid.

At this point it is worth reminding ourselves of Woodhead's finding above, that in any given community, an average of 59% of the people will consider themselves to be Christian. But what does that mean? In April 2014 the Prime Minister, David Cameron, sparked controversy by declaring that he believed Great Britain still to be a Christian country. By return fifty prominent members of the National Secular Society and their affiliates fired off a letter assenting that such a claim was both untrue and unhelpful. The following media storm revealed a depressing absence of religious literacy by many contributors, and a real inability to define what was meant by Britain being a Christian country. It wasn't until the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, entered the fray that the argument began to take some shape. Williams suggested that if Christian national identity was measured by church attendance then Britain was not a Christian country, but he suggested that Britain and its culture remains 'haunted' by its Christian roots. I would suggest that this ambivalence in relation to identity is felt at a local and parochial level. Numerical decline is a reality for many local church communities, but as Percy (2006) points out, there is still life in the parish model, albeit one that is continually evolving and metamorphosing, and that has to increasingly take into account and understand implicit alongside explicit expressions of faith.

Cameron (2003) and Guest, Olson & Wolffe (2012) map the decline in church association. Cameron's study is fascinating as it draws on the work of



Evers (1995) and Billis (1993) to locate a possible cause of decline in the tension of the voluntary sector being squeezed by changes within what Evers describes as the public, private and informal sectors (p.112). Billis locates the associational (voluntary) world in tension between the bureaucratic worlds of business and government. Cameron suggests that changes in the public, private sectors, in the bureaucratic worlds of business and government have implications for the voluntary or associational sector.<sup>102</sup> She gives the example of football that started as an associational activity and now has been commodified as a multi-million pound business. The state, Cameron argues, has co-opted the work of the church for its own purposes for example in the delivery of welfare services (p.114). David Cameron's call for a Big Society based on volunteering is a clear example of this, though his ire at the church's engagement with foodbanks might lead one to think that it has somewhat backfired on him. Historically the state has co-opted church initiatives in universal provision of schooling and healthcare for its own purposes. This insight is helpful in understanding how the meta-culture of Neo-Capitalism with its inherent bureaucracy actually impacts the micro-culture of local associational groupings.

Cameron goes on to identify three implications of this. Firstly, the commodification of church membership that "...turns the member into a user who pays a fee in order to receive a product or service that they chose in a manner convenient to them" (p. 115) She identifies the Alpha Course and annual festivals such as Spring Harvest and Soul Survivor and 'brands' seeking loyalty rather than encouraging a primary loyalty to their local church. Indeed the very use of the term 'membership' is indicative of a renewed interest in boundaries and a commodification of membership itself and connects directly to my concern around the predominance of 'church growth' thinking

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<sup>102</sup> For a detailed analysis of the bureaucratization of the church, see Chapter 7 'Bureaucratic ideology in established religion' in Percy, M (1998) *Power and the Church – ecclesiology in an age of transition* London: Cassell

The second way, according to Cameron, in which local church communities are affected by changes within public and private sectors, is in the co-option of church membership (p.115). This can be demonstrated by the piggy-backing of movements for social change on local church networks. This requires some nuanced thinking, as few would deny that working for social justice was a significant element in Christian discipleship. The issue Cameron identifies here is when through pressure from the state this comes to predominate the local church agenda, the examples given by Cameron are school governorship, NHS Trust board membership and Regeneration Project committee membership. She notes:

If organisations like this succeed in making an impact, they fit more comfortably the life styles of some people than does local church membership. (p. 116)

We have already seen how the church often colludes with secular agendas and we should not be blind to the co-dependency of this relationship. For many local church communities having a clear social purpose that can be seen to immediately produce results of some kind is a reassurance in the changing and confusing landscape of contemporary religious belief and practice.

The privatisation of church membership is the third implication of the tensions identified by Cameron. Membership becomes focused inwardly on the intimacy of the small group, often of homogenous social class. Cameron notes Putman's concern

...that these groups generate binding social capital rather than bridging social capital. In other words they exclude those who do not share their experience rather than bringing together people from different perspectives. It seems possible that affiliation to these groups may strengthen at the expense of participation in the local church. (p.117)

Cameron's analysis is pertinent to this thesis because it reveals that the influence of Neo-Capitalist thinking is not simply confined to ecclesial strategists and hierarchies, but permeates down to local and parochial level. It might be argued that even more so at this level, this manifests itself unconsciously rather than consciously (we have already seen the narrow divide between social action for justice and co-option by the public sector as a means of service delivery). All of this presents a significant temptation to the church, nationally and locally. The pressures from public and private sector that we might characterise as 'management and mission'<sup>103</sup> are beguiling. The pressure on small, often fragile and vulnerable local associational groups makes it very difficult to withstand and the temptation to capitulate to such models (in the absence of any accessible others) requires robust character and theological conviction.<sup>104</sup>

So I contend that, while the picture is far from homogenous, there is ample evidence of the permeation of neo-capitalist ideology at local and parish level and that the picture that I have painted of the church holds true.

Thus I will end by identifying three possible conclusions/implications of what we have discovered.

1. An excessive focus on church growth is counter-productive and undermines the character and mission of the Church.
2. The Church should prioritise the re-appropriation of its own character. It will do this through a discipline of performing the Christian narrative by a repertoire of shared practices.

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<sup>103</sup> 'Mission' is used here in its contemporary usage in the Church of England. As such is probably the most abused word in the ecclesial lexicon, having lost much of its classical resonance and now being substituted for 'evangelism (through good works)'

<sup>104</sup> As has been my case throughout this thesis, I do not seek to rule the insights of public and private sectors out of hand. I simply seek to make such engagement conscious and a dialogue of equal partners.

3. This will lead to the Church offering itself vicariously in the service of society as a microcosm of that society by offering its reflections on its own internal experience to that wider society.

**1. *An excessive focus on church growth is counter-productive and undermines the character and mission of the Church.***

I began with the suggestion that the contemporary church, rather than engaging with contemporary society, had actually capitulated to it. This was to be seen in the adoption within the church of many of the values of the New Capitalism that have been revealed as being so corrosive of character within secular society. Central to this has been the statistical auditing of the Church's life, along with the adoption of one of the central metaphors of free market economics, that of growth. I have claimed that such an approach has been equally corrosive of character within the Church. My contention was that the global financial crisis at the end of the first decade of the twenty first century marked a recognition of the failure of this economic model and the inappropriateness of growth as a foundational metaphor. One of the basic problems of this model was identified by Erich Fromm, who suggested that within a capitalist worldview acquisitiveness trumped ontology.

Other aspects of capitalist culture have been indiscriminately imported into the life of the Church, among them a culture of managerialism. The key word in all of this is perhaps 'indiscriminate', because it is not my contention that God is glorified by organisational chaos. However what has been so corrosive has been the importation of a culture of managerialism which doesn't notice or critique some of the assumptions that it brings with it and, as we have seen, that are corrosive to the nature of the Church.

Indeed the Church has been largely blind to the culture of modernism that permeates it, and from which market capitalism sprang. This is particularly evident in the search for an indisputable foundation for faith. This had led to a culture of extremism, in those who believe that a belief in the inerrancy of scripture to be the only secure foundation and the one that validates faith. For others it is the supremacy of personal experience, for others the literal

reality of the sacraments. This foundationalism has been deeply corrosive and the Church rather than addressing it theologically, has sought to manage it under the guise of diversity.

But the Church needs to be aware of another temptation, that of embracing a perceived 'holiness' as a means to further its growth. If holiness is to be embraced, it must be the genuine article and it must be embraced for its own merits. This is clearly recognised by Barth who writes:

"The true growth which is the secret of the upbuilding of the community is not extensive but intensive; its vertical growth in height and depth.....It is not the case that its intensive increase necessarily involves an extensive. We cannot, therefore, strive for vertical renewal merely to produce greater horizontal extension and a wider audience.... If it [the Church and its mission] is used only as a means of extensive renewal, the internal will at once lose its meaning and power. It can be fulfilled only for its own sake, and then – unplanned and unarranged – it will bear its own fruits. " (Barth 1958 p.648)

My claim is clear; the whole culture of market capitalism and especially the emphasis on growth is misplaced and erroneous. It blatantly has not halted institutional decline in the Church, indeed as I have suggested this form of growth may turn out to be a form of cancer that will hasten the demise of the church:

"An understanding of limit is also a prophylaxis against mistaking religious cancer for spiritual growth. In a capitalist/consumerist economy, we unthinkingly evaluate progress in terms of larger numbers. As we become habituated to this mind-set, we pay attention only to those parts of reality that we can measure with numbers. We get used to using the word *growth* in this context.

But we forget that growth is a biological, not arithmetical, metaphor. Growth in biology has to do with timing, passivity, waiting, proportion, maturity. There is a proper size to each thing. There are proportions to be attended to. It is an exceedingly complex and mysterious thing, this process of growth. Every congregation has proportions, symmetries, and a size proper to it. Different congregations in different places will have different proportions and sizes. No one from the outside can determine what that size is, but a wise pastor will be mindful and respectful of limits.” (Peterson, 1992 p.138)

This once again is evidence of the Church being unable or unwilling to seriously engage with contemporary culture and to radically re-envision its mission. Our culture can be described as post-Christian, post-institutional and perhaps most encouraging for the Church, post-secular, but it is deeply erroneous for the Church to imagine that a post-secular culture will once again yield all that the culture of Christendom did. As various authors have pointed out, post-secularism currently comprises of continued institutional decline along with a renewed openness in some sections of society to engage with the insights of faith.<sup>105</sup> Given all of this I suggest that the prevailing metaphor of growth has been a failure, indeed has contributed to the corrosion of the role of the Church in society, and thus needs to be radically rethought.

***2. The Church should prioritise the reappropriation of its own character. It will do this through a discipline of performing the Christian narrative by a repertoire of practices.***

Given this failure, I proposed that for the church to be effective in mission it needed to reappropriate its authenticity, its integrity. Thus I argued that the

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<sup>105</sup> See Ward, G. *The Politics of Discipleship* (2009) London SCM Press and a lecture written (and given in her absence due to illness) by Elaine Graham *Between a Rock and a Hard place* at St. Mary's Warwick, 2013.

most pressing challenge for the Church is the redevelopment of its own internal character. Virtue ethics offers a model for this reappropriation, shunning as it does the obligations of deontological ethics and the consequentialism of utilitarianism, both of which can be identified in the contemporary Church. Virtue ethics points to the formation of a virtuous character formed through practicing virtue and thereby building up the inner goods of any given activity. Thus for the Church to become more fully the Church it needs to consciously engage with those activities that make it the Church, and not be too concerned with its external successes or failures as it perceives them. The building up of the inner nature is what will ultimately enable the Church to be effective in what God is calling it too – indeed the Church will only discern what true mission is when it is true to itself.

How is this to be achieved? Well as we saw it is the inhabiting of particular narratives that create identity. The way then to form virtuous character within the Church is through the retelling and indeed performance of the Church's formative stories and the primary (though not exclusive) methodology of such a performance is liturgical worship. James K A Smith describes it thus:

“A liturgical anthropology recognises the primacy of ‘incarnate significance.’ For finite, embodied creatures like us, meaning is fundamentally rooted in metaphor because that is the inferential ‘logic’ of the body ...an adequate *liturgics* needs to be rooted in a phenomenological appreciation of a kind of *kinaesthetics* that is, in turn, the basis for appreciating the *aesthetics* of human understanding. In other words, at the heart of a liturgical anthropology is a recognition of not just the centrality of desire but also the centrality of the imagination.” (Smith 2013 p.124)

It is in performing the formative texts of the Christian narrative that we can imagine the future of the Church. Smith concludes that the real gift of liturgical formation is that of a ‘sanctified perception’ (Smith 2013 p.103ff).

Thus the Church becomes a community of practice as it seeks to perform its sacred texts through both worship and service.

The pedagogical language of communities of practice is instructive here. One of the 'practices' inherent in Communities of Practice is to reify concepts, to make the abstract tangible. Thus the practices can take on a sacramental character, belonging neither fully to the objective nor to the subjective. Liturgical practice can then be seen as fundamentally sacramental or, in psychodynamic language, as a transitional phenomenon. This understanding of sacramentality is essential in understanding how ecclesial character might be developed. Drawing on the work of Bruce Reed we saw that actions of this kind have a manifest and a latent function, and it is the latent function that is of paramount importance. A Church that fails to understand this misunderstands its own identity, and a church that puts all its energy into maintaining its manifest function and paying no attention to its latent function will never be truly effective in mission.

***3. This will lead to the Church offering itself in the service of society as a microcosm of that society by offering its reflections on its own internal experience to that wider society.***

The virtuous Church however, the Church that has concentrated on its inner constitution and on the practices that form its character, realises that it is its very inner life that is its primary tool in mission. The Church offers its inner life for the life of the world, on behalf of the world. Within the microcosm of the Church the challenges of life can be played out in an environment that is committed to love, compassion and justice. The reality is of course somewhat more complex, but the mission of the virtuous Church will to a large extent consist of vicariously engaging with issues *on behalf of* the wider society and through its internal experience may offer insight and wisdom to that wider world. Thus the Church becomes not only a community of practice, but also a community of interpretation - interpreting the reality of the external world through its own internal experience. This church already feels very different from the acquisitive church of the Church Growth Movement.



For the Church to be able to do this it must be fully integrated, or perhaps more correctly individuated - it must be sure of its own identity. A Church that is not clear what its purpose is and how that purpose is acted out will never be truly able to give of itself, the risks and the cost to its fragile identity would be too great. Thus we come to see that one of the primary missional tasks for the Church in this (and every) age is the development of its own identity in the form of holiness, wisdom and right action.

Thus the Church becomes a community of learning, a micro-polis in which individuals are able to better learn about themselves and a community that can explore the issues that face other communities and society more generally. However there is a danger here as we have seen. The Church that owns its identity as a learning community must ensure that the pedagogical models it uses are not indiscriminately imported from the surrounding society. Indeed the central pedagogy for ecclesial formation, as we have seen will be a commitment to and a participation in a community of practice that performs the formative narratives of the Christian tradition – it must remain true to its ecclesial ontology.

From this flows another connected challenge for the Church - the challenge to make available for the wider society its language of discourse in public theology. Perhaps with the exception of the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, the Church of England and its leaders have singularly failed to link persuasive theological debate with secular and political discourse. Perhaps this is indicative of how far from our ontological home we are, though it should be said that other ecclesial communities have fared no better. Either our theologising has something to offer or it doesn't - a church secure in its identity will be confident that it does.

Thus I believe that the Church of the future, the post-institutional, post-Christian, post-secular Church will be numerically significantly smaller even than it is now. Its authority (and it won't have much power) will rest not on

numerical strength, but on its integrity. Indeed this is the case in many provinces of the Anglican Communion already, where Anglicanism is not the established religion. There is nothing for the church to fear in all of this, indeed there might be much to celebrate; even a cursory review of history and particularly those periods in it when allegedly church attendance was high reveals them not to be the golden age we once imagined.<sup>106</sup> The great gift however of the current context is that the Church is forced to fall back on itself and rediscover who it truly is, it is forced to rediscover its own character and teleology.

The Church is predicated on the belief that from death new life emerges. It certainly feels like the Church of England and much of western Christianity is at the end of an epoch. As it seeks to move from one way of being to another (whose characteristics may not yet be entirely clear) it should not be afraid of leaving behind the purported numerical strength of yesteryear, nor indeed attempt to recapture that which is past, but rather embrace, as God's people have done in the past, its vocation to be a faithful remnant, constantly formed and re-formed by the performance of its formative narratives, and thus play its part in the building of God's Kingdom.

### **What next?**

This thesis has argued that the Church, and the Church of England more specifically, needs to re-appropriate its character, which I suggest, can be understood as being rooted in an ethic of virtue. I have suggested that one way this is achieved through the undertaking of a shared repertoire of practices, and I have suggested that these practices will be, in the broadest sense, sacramental, which will lead to the formation of holiness, wisdom and an inclination to orthopraxis in individuals and corporately in the Church.

Like many writers on the classical virtues, who refrained from defining exactly what the individual virtues were, in favour of a more general focus

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<sup>106</sup> See Gill, R. *The Myth of the Empty Church* London SPCK 1993

on Virtue per se, I have shied away from being prescriptive as to the exact nature of the practices I believe are needed. Undoubtedly more work needs to be done on this, not least within the context of our understanding of the inner goods that these practices produce. There then is more work to be done on the inner life of the Church and its relationship with its external and visible life. This is especially true in context of the recent emerging focus on the Church as being a major player in transforming local (and national) communities. This thesis has advanced a particular model of how the Church, reflecting on its own inner life, can use that inner experience as a means of interpreting the wider society to itself. This is not the model currently being advocated by practitioners, which is more based on the development of social enterprises that facilitate grass-roots change in communities.

There is much I suggest that is praise worthy in this approach, but I think there is more work to be done on whether in the long run this does not prove to be sectarian. We need to recall Reed's assertion that functional religion at its most effective is invisible. Such an assertion is hugely challenging to the culture of the Church of seeking to justify its own existence that has become so prevalent, and which to some extent is demanded by the wider society. But it may be that this is a distracting idol as well. Does the withdrawal of the Church and Christians from their involvement in the secular structures of society, from being leaven in the lump, into ghettoised 'church projects' serve the aims of mission in the long run, or is it symptomatic of a broader withdrawal from public life and loss of confidence?

So there remain unconcluded issues about the exact nature of practices and the means whereby those inner goods that are produced by virtuous character are deployed in the service of the Kingdom. But there remains one other big question that this thesis has not addressed, and that is to explore the organisational implications, not least for the parish system so beloved of the Church of England, for a Church that would embrace an ecclesiology

based on virtue. Would such a system be sustainable in the light of such a change in focus, or does the parish system depend on a folk religiosity that is less than mature and integrated? Or perhaps the parish system can be recalibrated and reordered to take seriously and the religious aspirations of a population which are not currently being met by the institutional church?

This thesis has sought to open up a conversation about the potential insights that a character-based approach might offer to ecclesiological discourse. As the Church discovers the dead-end of the growth metaphor, then it will search around for a new guiding principle. As this thesis has shown, there is an emerging conversation and ever increasing literature that is beginning to engage the formation of virtuous character with ecclesiological debate, as the Church continues to evolve into the next stage of its development.

***Word Count: 83849***

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